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EARTHLY SHADOWS

THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM.

**PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE AND COMPANY
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EARTHLY SHADOWS

OF

THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

BY THE

REV. FREDERICK WHITFIELD, M.A.,

Minister of Emmanuel Church, Wimbledon, Surrey,

AUTHOR OF "VOICES FROM THE VALLEY," "CHRIST IN THE WORD," ETC. ETC.



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PREFACE.

A WRITER has reason to tremble when he writes on any greatly controverted subject. By partisans he will be judged in no measured terms. By critics he may be judged fairly, though with an overstrictness which admits of no apology. I feel I have, in this volume, laid myself open to stricture. But I thank God I have written what I have written after long and serious thought, and much prayer and study.

I feel sure there are many who cannot agree with me in my views of the leaven, and probably of the mustard-seed, treasure, and pearl. I must ask the kind indulgence of these dear friends, and beg of them to remember that I am only a learner; and if I am wrong, that I may have their prayers to be guided into the way of truth.

I have felt it necessary, in order to elucidate the

truths I have advanced, to refer to other writers. I feel especially indebted to the valuable works of His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin, for many thoughts in this volume; also to the Rev. Austen Phelps, the Rev. Dr Baylee, and the excellent Author of "Aids to Prayer," a book which cannot fail to delight and instruct every Christian into whose hands it may fall.

May the God of all grace use this volume for His glory. I have written it solely for this. I now commend it to Him.

WIMBLEDON, SURREY, 1871

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CHAPTER I.

ON PARABLES AND PARABOLIC TEACHING.

MATT. xiii. 3.

“He spake many things unto them in parables.”

CHAPTER I.

ON PARABLES AND PARABOLIC TEACHING.

Most of our blessed Lord's teaching was conveyed through the medium of parables. What human language is to thought as a medium of communication, the world in which we live is to the hidden spiritual world of which it is the outward representation. When we use anything in the external world to express that which is hidden and spiritual we adopt the parabolic mode of teaching.

Parable is illustration, but it is much more than illustration. We may draw an illustration from something which *may* exist but which does not in reality. Parabolic teaching differs from this, in that the hidden spiritual truth finds in every case its exact counterpart in the outer world. The one is a reflection of the other. "There are spiritual realities which underlie all the processes of nature, and all the institutions of human society, and which, though unseen, are the bases of everything. These the parable brings to light. The outer world answers with strange and marvellous exactness to

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the inner world. That outer world, in all its varied forms and relations, answers to the inner as the glass answers to the face.¹ Where there is shadow there also is substance, without which the shadow could not be. That inner and spiritual world is substance ; the outer world in which we daily live is its shadow.

If all things around us are thus God's ambassadors, reflecting in one form and another His light and glory, with what a solemn interest everything, even the meanest, is invested ! How natural it seems that the worm, the fish, the gourd, the sparrow alone on the house-top, and the sighing of the wind among the trees of the forest, should come into play as the agents of the Almighty ! Each has some whisper for the opened ear, some voice to utter its Maker's praise, some form in which to display, in shades of light of ever-varying beauty, the exceeding riches of His grace, or the transcendent loveliness of His character.

It may be asked, what occasion for adopting another form of teaching than that which could have been supplied through the medium of human language ? Into the reasons why our Lord adopted this mode of instruction we shall enter presently. We would only remark that human language, in its very best form, is too poor a medium to express adequately or accurately the fulness of the divine mind. The parable is a noble supplement. Nature in her ten thousand forms is ever unfolding herself to the attentive observer. From her vast re-

sources new treasures are developed from age to age. She is thus speaking in ever fresh language to the soul. No human alphabet could do this. Thus the medium for reaching our understandings and hearts is as far beyond that of mere alphabets as it could possibly be. It is true that even nature herself is only a channel; and all channels must ever be inadequate to express *infinite* truths, and especially the ocean-fulness that is in Him. Yet it is a channel compared with which human language sinks into insignificance. The very adoption of it by our blessed Lord is in itself a standing testimony to the poverty of language to unfold His character and kingdom.

After all, human language expresses very little. Two processes are at work in the act of all writing and speaking—the pen and the tongue. The *mind* sees its subject in all its bearings and in all its magnitude, and so considers *itself* rather than the hearer and reader, who approach the subject from an outside stand-point. “Men cannot print tones, glances, sighs, and tears. The heart, and the subject of the heart, always suffers by being translated into speech. History can never be written. It can only be dimly outlined from the particular stand-point the historian has chosen to occupy. It is only by courtesy that any man can be called a historian. Seldom do men so flatly contradict each other as upon points of fact. Incompleteness, to say the least of it, marks all narrations. No man could fully write even his own life. On reviewing

the sheets which were to have told everything, the autobiographer is struck with their reticence and poverty.” *

The poverty of human language to express God’s voice, whether it be His voice in nature or in the human soul, is at no time more palpably felt than in prayer. How poor are all words to tell out the big thoughts that fill the soul! What Christian has not felt it? None can bear such testimony to the poverty of language as the soul that has been most in communion with God. Before passing on to the subject more immediately before us, I cannot avoid transcribing the beautiful thoughts of another on this point:—

“If prayer be the communion of the soul with God, it is but a little part of it that can be uttered in words; and still less of it that will take form of words in the presence of others. Of outward wants, of outward things, of one’s purely earthly estate, we can speak freely. But of the soul’s inward life—of its struggles with itself, its hopes, yearnings, griefs, loves, joys, of its very personality—it is reserved, and to such a degree, that there can be no prayer expressive of the inward life until we have entered into the closet and shut to the door. Every Christian, whose life has developed itself into great experience of secret prayer, knows that the hidden things of the closet transcend all uttered prayer as much in depth, richness, and power, as they do in volume and space.

“Sometimes we mourn the loss of old books in ancient libraries; we marvel what more the world would have had if the Alexandrian library had not perished; we regret the decay of parchments, the rude waste of monks with their stupid

* “Ecce Deus.”

palimpsests. We sorrow for the lost arts, and grieve that the fairest portions of Grecian art lie buried from research ; that the Parthenon should come down within two hundred years of our time, with its wealth of magnificence, a voice in stone from the old world to the new, and yet perish almost before our eyes !

" But when one reflects upon the secret history which has transpired in men's thoughts, and that the noblest natures have been they whose richest experiences could never have been drawn forth through the pen or recorded in books, but have found utterance through prayer, and before the conscious glory of the Invisible Presence, I am persuaded that the silent literature of the closet is infinitely more wonderful in every attribute of excellence than all that has been sung in song, or recorded in literature, or lost in all the concussions of time. If rarest classical fragments, the perished histories and poets of every people, could be revived, they would be as nothing in comparison with the effusions of the closet, could they be gathered and recorded.

" How many souls, so large and noble that they rose up in those days of persecution, and left home and love for the faith of Christ, and went to the wilderness and dwelt therein, gave forth in prayer their whole life ! Doubtless their daily prayers were rich and deep in spiritual life. But there are peculiar days to all—days of vision—days when we see all human life as in a picture, and all future life as in a vision ; and when the reason, the imagination, the affections, and the experiences of life are so tempered together that we consciously live more in an hour than at other times in months. Every man has his mountains of transfiguration, and sees and talks with the revealed and radiant dead. In such experiences, what must have been the wonders of prayer, when the noblest natures—rich in all goodness, deeply cultured in knowledge, refined in all taste, and enriched in pure lives, but driven out among the wild shaking leaves of the wilderness for their faith's sake—poured out their whole soul before God, their conscious weakness and sinfulness, their yearnings and trials,

their hopes and strivings, their sense of this life and their view of the other, their longing for God's Church on earth, and their prospect of the glorified Church in heaven ! What if some listener had made haste to put down the prayers of Luther, with all his strong crying and tears, if that had been possible ! How many noble natures gave up to celibacy and virginity the wondrous treasures of multitudinous affections. And when at periods of heart-swellings, in hours when the secret tide set in upon men from the eternal ocean, and carried them upon mighty longings and yearnings towards God, before whom they poured forth in mingled sobs and words those affections which were meant to be eased in the love-relations of life, but which, hindered and choked, found tumultuous vent in mighty prayer to God !

" Consider what mothers' hearts have always been. How many thousand thousands of them have watched day and night over the cradle till the body failed and the spirit waxed even keener ; and with what wondrous gushes of words, such as would disdain to be called eloquence, have they besought God, with every persuasion, for the life of the child ! We judge these things by our own experience. All the words that were ever spoken, and all the thoughts that we have conceived, are unfit to bear up the skirt of those prayers, which burst, without words, right out of our hearts, for the life of dying children !

" Consider what a heavenly wonder must be the Book of Prayer that lies before God ! For groans are interpreted there. Mute joys gain tongue before God. Unutterable desires, that go silently up from the heart, burst forth into divine pleadings when, touched by the Spirit, their imprisoned nature comes forth ! Could thoughts or aspirations be made visible, could they assume a form that befitted their nature, what an endless procession would be seen going towards the throne of God, day and night ! Consider the wrestlings of all the wretched, the cry of orphans, the ceaseless pleadings of the bereaved and of those fearing bereavement ; the prayer of trust betrayed, of hope darkened, of home deserted, of joy quenched ;

the prayers of faithful men from dungeons and prison-houses; the prayers of slaves, who found man, law, and the Church twined around and set against them, and had no way left to look but upward towards God! The hearts of men by myriads have been pressed by the world as grapes are trodden in a wine-press, and have given forth a heavenly wine. Beds of long-lingered sickness have learned such thoughts of resignation, and such patient trust and joy, that the heavenly book is bright with the footprints of their prayers! The very silence of sickness is often more full of richest thoughts than all the books of earth have ever been!" *

To return to our subject. Though this outer world is so glorious and reflects in every form the character of God, yet does it groan and travail in pain. It is longing to bring to the birth. It cannot tell out all that it means. There is something which it hopes to be and longs to be, but which it is not yet. Its true language is hidden in the womb. It lies under a curse. Thorns and briars have choked its wondrous meaning. It can only speak in dark dim shadows of what it is. But a day is at hand when it shall tell a wondrous story. It shall reflect as in a dewdrop every ray of the Sun of Righteousness, who shall shine upon it with healing in His wings. It shall cast off every shadow with which it has so long struggled in the dark night through which it is passing. God hasten that time for Christ's sake!

What the outer world of nature is to the inner world of spirit God Incarnate, the Man Christ Jesus,

* "Aids to Prayer," Strahan & Co.

is to the invisible God. The *invisible* God is made intelligible through the *visible*. And as Christ is the exponent of the invisible God so is He of all invisible things. Say what we will, only as we read the unintelligible in His light can we understand anything. Jesus, and Jesus only, is the microscope and the telescope of all unseen things.

The view we have taken of parables and parabolic teaching, is strikingly confirmed in the chapter on which we are about to enter. We are there told, “All these things spake Jesus unto them in parables; and without a parable spake He not unto them; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken unto them by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” If we refer to the Psalm from which these words are quoted (Psalm lxx. 2), we shall find that it is simply a summary of the *history of Israel*. Yet we are thus instructed that all this history was a parable—“*dark sayings*,”—that is, *underneath* their history there lay deeper *spiritual* truths which were *now* being brought to light by the gospel. Thus it is we should ever regard history as shadowing forth darkly the great realities of God’s spiritual kingdom. St Paul gives us a hint of the same thing when he says, “Now we see through a glass darkly.” He thus teaches us that everything on earth is to be regarded as a “glass” or “reflector;” that we are to look *through* everything, and to see in everything a reflection of *divine* things.

This was the most prominent and striking feature in our blessed Lord's character. We form our estimate of a man's character from the way in which he looks at things. This was strikingly illustrated in His life. He gave to everything a heavenly meaning. He regarded nature, in all its departments, as so many avenues to spiritual realities. If He looked upon a sheep or a sheepfold, He saw in it the believer and the church of God. If His eye fell upon the sower sowing his seed, He saw in it the gospel and the heart of man. Everything was to Him only the *shadow* of some deep and substantial reality. All nature took the colour of His own mind. He lived on the *other side* of things seen. He moved in *His own* kingdom. He lived in that which everything here reflected. He was emphatically the Heavenly Man. The world in which He lived left its impress on His looks, on the very tones of His voice, and on every act and deed. This was the God-Man as He moved about in our world. As has been beautifully remarked—

"Jesus was in heaven while He lived on earth (John iii. 13); the essence of all things lay before Him. God and His kingdom, Satan and his kingdom, He beheld and traced throughout. He opened His mouth in parables.

"He spake of nature. He had watched the clouds and the red sky at evening; the sun in his glory; the fowls of the air in their blithe carelessness; the flowers of the field in their gorgeous beauty; the wisdom of serpents, the guilelessness of doves; the eagle's keen eye and sudden descent; the hen gathering her chickens under her wings; the wind blowing where it listeth; the vine and its branches; the

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trees good and bad; the fig-tree and its leaves; the mustard-seed and its development;—all this became to Him a picture of heavenly things.

“He spake of man; of the relationships and occupations of human life; of the eye as the light of the body; of the eye and hand which endanger life and health, and require to be cut off; of the sick, who need a physician; of the father giving good gifts to his child; of the mother rejoicing that a child is born into the world; of the friend showing himself friendly to his neighbour; of the shepherd and the flock; the king and his nation; the master and his stewards; the merchant seeking goodly pearls; the sower going forth to sow; the fishermen casting out the net; even the little children playing in the market place;—and in all this He beheld pictures of eternal truth and spiritual relationships. . . .

“He noticed the common objects and events around Him: salt; the light and candlestick; the house and its foundation; the door; bread and water; the ways of the good householder. He spake of the marriage-feast and the wedding-garment;—in all He beheld the things that are real and are for ever.

“And how constantly does He use the Scripture symbolism—speaking of the temple as His body, the manna in the wilderness, the brazen serpent, the water drawn at the feast, the vineyard which bare no fruit—according to the way in which God had spoken of them to His people.

“This parabolic teaching is not for the purpose of making difficult truth more easy to a passive intellect or an inactive conscience. It has for its object to conceal the precious jewel from the eye of the sluggard and worldly, and to rouse the mind and to prepare the heart of the sincere. The chief purpose, however, is, according to the spirit of parabolic teaching, to impress on us that we are even now in eternity; that everywhere we are surrounded by the same God; that the invisible kingdom is manifested in the visible; that God, and His truth, and His righteousness, are the true reality and substance.”*

* “Christ and the Scriptures,” Rev. A. Saphir.

And we are called to be like Him in this respect. We are to give to everything a heavenly meaning. We are to invest everything with a spiritual character. We are ourselves heavenly by birth and adoption. We are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. The mind of heaven is to be impressed on our words and deeds, and on the way in which we look at all earthly things. This *will* be the case if the mind is spiritual. Everything will then take the colouring of the mind. It is not as *Christians* that we shall thus see all things reflecting the deep things of God. It will only be as our own souls are living in God's presence. Everything will remain a "dark saying" to us otherwise. We shall only walk in shadows. Our characters will take the tone of that in which we habitually live—they will be *shadowy*. There will be nothing deep or solid about us. Reader, beware of this *unreal* character. Live on the other side of these shadows. Get your own soul deeply imbued with God's presence. Let that atmosphere be your dwelling-place. Learn the blessed secret of coming back to it from everything. With mind and heart thus imbued, you will see in the falling leaf and the opening blossom, in the pebble by the road-side and the cloud passing over your head, in the lightning's flash and the ray of sunshine, characters you have never read before;—all revealing to you something of His glory who sits upon the throne, and whose light fills the lowliest and the loftiest of all earthly things.

Nature will thus present itself to you as only the scaffolding of God's spiritual temple. It will be the ladder set up on earth by every step of which you may rise to heaven. The little things you formerly despised, or on which you trod so thoughtlessly, will be taken up and treasured; and in entertaining the very meanest you will find you have been entertaining "angels unawares."

Reader, whoever you are, it is only in this spirit you can understand these parables. To see their wondrous beauty, their deep teaching, you must follow the example of the disciples in this chapter. While *outside* and with the *crowd* they could not understand these parables. But when they went "into the house" with Jesus there He expounded to them these dark sayings. So too must we act. All is dark in this world. What mystery on every side! What baffling enigmas! So it is and so it will be, till we go "into the house," till we get alone with Jesus. In His presence the dark becomes light, the problem receives its solution. Just as you approach Jesus there is *exposition*. Just as you recede, mystery remains, nay increases. "In Thy light shall we see light." The measure of the value of any truth is the power it possesses of bringing you near to Christ and Christ near to you. The light which any truth reflects is in proportion to its approach to Him. The farther from Him the darker everything becomes. And in proportion as all things recede from that point of light do we approach the confines—

"outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Before closing this chapter there is one point to which it is most needful I should allude, and to which I direct the reader's special attention, namely, as to the right mode of interpreting the parables. On no subject in the Word of God have we need to be so watchful as here. The very nature of parabolic teaching affords unlimited scope for endless interpretations, and the wildest theories have professed to find their scope in them. In endeavouring to obtain the right view of a parable place yourself as you would in the centre of a circle. Get firm hold of the great central truth from which all the minor ones radiate, or act as its fringe or ornament. Unless you do this the centre and the circumference will never have true proportions. Every truth, however far it stretches, should be connected with the centre, and should find its way back there as clearly as the rays of the sun in nature. A false interpretation will invariably betray itself by controverting some important thread in the entire account. Truth must harmonise. There is no jar, no conflicting element, in a right interpretation. Its parts all meet together in a common point. So it is with the parables. Learn to read *their* language, but do not compel them to speak *yours*. Do not thrust into them your own meaning, but draw out from them their own. Do not try to find your system in them, but build your system from them. Look at them with a mind released from all pre-

vious conceptions and prejudices. Thus will you learn their true and wondrous meaning. The words of a writer, to whose work I have already referred, are nowhere truer in their application than in the study of the parables of God's Word, and especially applicable to those on which we are now entering. He says—

"The human mind tends to pass from one extreme of truth to the other. The mind of communities touches both extremities before it settles down at the intermediate point of truth. There is no great truth which, being pressed far enough in one direction, will not meet another bearing up against it from the opposite. There is, for instance, the truth of man's liberty : press it far enough, and it will be met and restrained by the equal truth of man's dependence. The truth of man's individuality ; press it to a certain distance, and it will meet another truth, equally certain—man's associated life. There is the truth of the necessity of helping men, and the other truth, just as important, that if you help them you will destroy them ; for there is nothing worse than help which impairs the disposition of men to help themselves; and nothing so bad as not to help them when they need help. There is also the doctrine of free agency, and the counter-doctrine of dependence upon God. There is no one great line of thought which, being pursued at length, does not meet another coming from the opposite ; and a man's mind should stand at the centre of the wheel, and all truths should come to it from every side as the spokes of one great wheel.

"It is on this account that men vibrate between two extremes ; and only after wide investigation that they take in all truth."*

O Lord of light and love and mercy, keep reader and writer of these lines ever moving onward in

* "Aids to Prayer."

the direction of "the truth as it is in Jesus!" Remove every prejudice from the heart and every film from the mind, that so in the midst of the clouds and darkness which beset our path we may be guided into all truth, and glorify Thy Holy Name!

"Light of lights ! my fears dispelling,
Chase every darkness from my soul ;
There, by Thine own Spirit dwelling,
Each desire and thought control.

"Bid me rise,—and then, forsaking
All that binds my heart below,
My soul shall mount—new visions breaking
Brighter still, as on I go.

"Gracious Lord, to me discover
The hidden riches of Thy love ;
Rend the veil, the clouds that cover
That bright world of Thine above.

"Make me live on earth a stranger,
Heedless of its joys and woes ;
Stayed on Thee in every danger,
Secure whatever storm blows.

"Make me live like one whose treasure,
Home, and friends are all above ;
Who knows no bliss, no peace, no pleasure,
But that which flows from Thy pure love."



CHAPTER II.

THE SEVEN PARABLES.

MATT. xiii. 3.

"He spake many things unto them in parables."

CHAPTER II.

THE SEVEN PARABLES.

THE parabolic form of teaching was something new to our Lord's disciples. This is evident from the question which on this occasion they put to Him : " Why speakest Thou unto them in parables ? "

Parables have a twofold object—to reveal and to conceal. In the chapter we are considering this twofold object is presented to us. Up to this time our Lord had spoken to the Scribes and Pharisees, and people generally, in ordinary and plain language. All His teaching and His actions, however, they ascribed to the devil. Under these circumstances, as they refused to receive the light, that light veiled itself from them. The parable is truth veiled. The adoption of this form of instruction was a sign of judgment. This is brought before us very solemnly, yet very graphically, in the previous chapter.

But though this is the dark side of parabolic teaching, it has a bright one. The spiritual perceptions of the common people had at this time sunk very low. Their understandings could only be reached through figures from the external world. Through that world the Lord spoke to them, to lead them into that inner world, of which the external

is a reflection. Thus while, on the one hand, to those who would not listen they *concealed* truth, on the other they *revealed* truth to those who were disposed to seek it. Like the pillar of cloud and fire, as has been beautifully remarked, the parables had a double effect. To the enemies of the Lord they were a cloud and darkness, but to those who sought the truth they were light. The parable draws after it the truth it represents, and stimulates to further search. According to the state of heart of him who hears it is either judgment or mercy. If the heart is disposed to search it is mercy, and leads to light. If the heart be indisposed it is judgment, leaving the soul in deeper darkness.

This is the explanation of the terrible judicial blindness pronounced in this thirteenth chapter. That blindness has its seat in the heart. Observe how clearly the Spirit of God sets it before us and in divine order—the state of the heart acting on the intelligence and understanding, and these again reacting on the heart. “This people *hear* and yet will not understand: they *see* and yet cannot perceive, for the *heart* is waxed gross.” And because the heart is gross, the ear is heavy, and the eye is closed. Therefore to them, our Lord says, “it is not *given* to know the mysteries of the kingdom.” The ear hears according to the state of heart; and an *intelligent insight* results from an *intelligent hearing*. Parables set truth before the *eye* in figures from the external world. If the *ear* hears their lessons the heart is instructed.

This was the case with the Lord's disciples. To them it "was given to know the mysteries of God's kingdom." Why? Because under the operation of God's Holy Spirit they gave the *ear* and the *eye* (verse 16).

And mark again the awful responsibility resting upon those who have eyes and ears to hear and perceive the things of God. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." The meaning of this passage is very clear. Whosoever *keeps* and *uses* his gifts shall be rewarded by an increase. But whosoever allows them to lie unused shall lose those gifts. They will become powerless from want of exercise. There is nothing arbitrary in this passage. It contains a law of nature. Moral principles become stronger by exercise. For lack of exercise they become weak and expire. In the intellectual, in the animal, and in the vegetable world, the same law prevails. Our Lord in these words was but enunciating a universal principle in divine operation. The parable of the pounds is simply this principle fully brought out.

It is deeply instructive to notice how this truth is confirmed in other parts of Scripture. Of old the glory of the Lord filled the house. But because of Israel's unbelief and sin, it is next seen on the *threshold*, lingering there, as if unwilling to depart. Then it is seen *ascending*. Many and mighty were the works of the Son of God in Bethsaida. But

its people had rejected the light. Now, the Lord will not shew the light again. He takes the blind man "*out of the town*" before He will heal him. Thus the light was retiring. Added to this there comes an awful word of judgment. He says to the blind man, "Neither *go into* the town, nor *tell it to any* in the town." Bethsaida, like the unbeliefing multitude in this chapter, was thus shut up in judicial blindness. "*Woe unto thee, Bethsaida!*" was henceforth the cry from heaven.

Again, in John xii. 34, the people say, "We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest Thou the Son of Man must be lifted up? who is this Son of Man?"

Mark, reader, our Lord's solemn answer, which, as was frequently the case with Him, He confirms by an *external* but deeply significant act. "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: " "While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them." Thus by the *outward act* of speaking and then *hiding* Himself, He shewed them that *He* was the light, and that it was now withdrawing from view. The way in which our Lord frequently set the seal to His word by some external act, may be seen by referring to John viii. 6-8 and Luke xxiv. 28. These are, however, only a few instances out of many.

The parables we are considering are designed to

bring before us the Gospel of the kingdom, in its rise, progress, full development, and final issues.

The fact of the Gospel having to be published at all in our world, is a proof of our fall. Our Queen has no occasion to publish her sovereignty—her rights as Queen—in her own dominions. If she had, would it not imply disaffection and rebellion on the part of her subjects? Yet God has to publish His rights in His own world! What a solemn thought! God has to publish His rights and proclaim His authority in His own world! Man is in a state of apostacy and in mad rebellion against his Maker.

And yet what a proclamation it is! How full of mercy and grace! What deep compassion! What tender pity and abounding love! When the Saviour opened the Book in the synagogue, and had read from it, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; *to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,*” He closed the Book again. Why did He close the Book at these remarkable words? Why did he not go on to read, “and the *day of vengeance* of our God”? How deeply significant it was! His love overflowed! His heart yearned with pity over the fallen and the lost. He closed the Book at the words of mercy and love. Yes, there *the Book always closes!* Beyond that even the God-man did not go. He left vengeance

in the Statute Book. He did not erase it, but sent love and mercy in advance, leaving wrath in the background. Oh that we always did the same ! Love, mercy, tenderness, compassion—all in advance. All else in the background !

It may seem strange that the greatest and mightiest things of all, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word of God—all comprised in the Gospel of the kingdom—should be compared to a small seed. We should have selected something greater and nobler. But there is a divine reason for this. The tendency of man is to estimate things by their *magnitude* and *extent*. God would rebuke this tendency, and shew that we must estimate everything by *principle*. Therefore He has selected the little seed as the representative of all that is great and grand and glorious. The seed, so minute and insignificant, contains within itself the harvest.

Besides this, the Gospel is *life*. The seed contains that life within itself. It possesses an energy that will throw off its superincumbent mass, and rise to greatness. For three thousand years three grains of Egyptian wheat lay concealed in the hand of a mummy. They were taken out and planted ; and harvests are now waving in our land in the form of Egyptian wheat. For three thousand years they retained the principle of life—life maintained within the very grasp of death. So with the seed of the Gospel. It may lie dormant for ages yet will it retain its life ; and under the

breath of God's Spirit will put forth its mighty power. You may persecute and tread it down, you may overlay it with every unfavourable element and oppressive influence, but crush it you cannot. The seed will spring, and not only spring, but it will be a life-giving power to harvests of souls.

But the seed is a connecting link. It stands in close relation to the *sower* on the one hand and the *ground* on the other. The design of the sower is, that this little seed should *lay hold* of the ground. Unless it do so, and spring up and bring forth fruit, there will be no link between the sower and the ground. That ground is man's heart. That seed is the Gospel of Christ. It is the thing that connects the heart with the Saviour. Where it really lays hold of the heart, there is a living and eternal link between that heart and the Saviour. The history of this seed, as it falls from the hand of the sower, is presented to us in the four states of ground of which the wayside is the first. The seed falls *on* the ground, but does not *take hold* of it; or rather, the *ground* does not take hold of *it*. There is consequently no living link between this ground and the sower. It remains barren and unfruitful.

Though placed in consecutive order in this chapter, these parables were not all spoken at the same time. St Matthew, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, has arranged them in this order for a special purpose—to bring before us the origin, development, and final issues of the kingdom of God. That kingdom is likened, in this chapter,

to things animate and inanimate—to seed, to leaven, to a pearl, and to a merchantman. The Church of Christ is the great truth which all creation was designed to reflect. Every object in nature, animate and inanimate, was designed to serve this end in the mind of Christ.

This Gospel of the kingdom was also designed to have a world-wide extension. Accordingly we read, in the very first verse of the chapter, that when Jesus spoke these parables, “He *rent out of the house* and *sat by the sea-side*.” The objects of comparison are gathered from *sea and land*. There is sowing and reaping; trees and plants; birds of the air and fish of the sea; nets and fishing boats; the household bread and the fruit of the field; the sun in the heavens; the earth on which we live and the great deep beneath it. Air, earth, and sea, with all that is in them, things animate and inanimate, are brought forward to shadow forth the mighty character and universal sway of that kingdom which, beginning with “the least of all seeds,” should, in the fulness of time, “blossom and bud and fill the face of the whole earth with fruit.”

Another feature which characterises every one of these parables is, that the object to which the kingdom is likened is *hidden*. The seed, the leaven, the treasure, the pearl, the fish—all are hidden things, though some of these are outwardly *manifested*. The Jewish expectation of Messiah’s kingdom was exactly the reverse of this. It was one of visible, powerful, and universal manifestation. It was to

come "with observation." Our blessed Lord meets this erroneous view, and presents it as coming imperceptibly from obscure and despised beginnings. The *hidden* character of the kingdom thus presented accords with the teaching of the whole of the New Testament. Its subjects are hidden : "it doth not yet appear what we shall be," "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him." Its spiritual life is hidden : "your life is hid with Christ in God." Its King is hidden : "though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Its peace, its joys, its hopes and prospects—all are hidden things ; "we walk by faith, not by sight," "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

After our blessed Lord had spoken to His disciples the first of these parables, they came to Him and said, "Declare unto us the parable." Thus Jesus had to interpret *His own* words.

It is so still. Even the words of Jesus need His own interpretation. We are so dark, so blind and ignorant, that unless He himself is our Teacher we can understand nothing. Reader, in entering on the more detailed study of these parables let us not forget this. At every step may the thought go up to Him, with His blessed Word

in our hands, Lord, teach me; declare to *me* this truth of Thine I am now reading; shew me *Thy* light that in it I may *see* light." With Him as our Teacher, and His Spirit as our Guide, however ignorant, we shall understand all. Thus shall we be able to say with Müller the great historian: "The Gospel is the fulfilment of all hopes, the perfection of all philosophy, the interpreter of all revolutions, the key to all seeming contradictions in the physical and moral world. It is life; it is immortality. Since I have known the Saviour, everything is clear; with Him there is nothing that I cannot solve."

"The night shall soon be over,
 The morning soon shall dawn;
 The twilight and the darkness
 Alike shall soon be gone:
 Soon, soon shall come the dayspring,
 When we from earth shall rise
 To bright celestial glories,
 Far, far beyond the skies.

"There joy in all its fulness,
 And pleasures evermore,
 Shall fill the heart with raptures
 That ne'er were known before;
 For we shall see our Jesus,
 The dearest object there—
 The chief among ten thousand,
 The altogether fair.

"With joy we 'll view those mansions—
 Those streets of purest gold—
 Those everlasting glories,
 Of which not half was told;

Shall gaze upon those pearl-gates,
So dazzling and so bright,
But, oh, 'tis Jesus only
Shall be our soul's delight.

" We 'll turn from all the glory
Of that thrice-blessèd place,
And drawing near to Jesus
Shall gaze upon His face.
Yes, yes, 'tis Jesus only
Can satisfy the heart,
Not e'en the brightest glory
Can lasting joy impart.

" We ne'er shall tire in gazing
Upon our Jesus' face ;
We ne'er shall cease in praising
The wonders of His grace.
Throughout eternal ages,
We 'll worship and adore
Our dear and loving Jesus,
Who all our sorrows bore.

" Oh ! may the love of Jesus
Constrain us here below,
To cast aside earth's pleasures,
Its vain pursuits forego.
May none but Jesus only
Our praises here employ,
To serve Him and Him only,
Our chiefest aim and joy."

—*Friendly Greetings.*

MATT. xiii. 3.

"He spake many things unto them in parables."

CHAPTER III.

THE SEVEN PARABLES—(*continued.*)

As we have before remarked, the seven parables of this chapter are designed to bring before us the rise, progress, full development, and final issues of the Gospel of the kingdom.

This great subject is brought before us in a seven-fold aspect. A slight glance at the chapter will shew us that the seven parables are subdivided into four and three. Seven, four, and three—these are the great divisions of the subject: and as *representative* numbers, they bring before us some important points by which we may arrive at a clear understanding.

The number *seven* is God's number, denoting *perfection*. God has selected one number in His Word, above all other numbers, to express the perfection of His works *in relation to His creatures*. To trace this number throughout Scripture confirming this view would be a most interesting study, but a few passages will suffice. It was the close of creation's work. There it had its source. On the seventh day God rested. The seventh day He blessed. The seventh day He sanctified. Everything in which the soul really

rests is consecrated and blessed. It is the end of all work to that soul. It was the end of all work to God. Rest is the final consummation of everything, and with it is associated all blessing.

This number, with its characteristic meaning, runs through the Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. There are seven petitions in the Lord's Prayer; and, like the seven parables of the chapter we are considering, these seven are subdivided into four and three—the first three referring to *God*, the last four to *man*. The same number is conspicuous in the Sermon on the Mount; and, more remarkably still, in St John's address to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. i.) In the last verse of the chapter to which we have referred the number seven occurs no fewer than six times.

The reader can now trace for himself throughout Scripture, the symbolic import of this constantly-recurring number; in every case bringing before us the perfections of God in relation to His works.

What is the meaning of this number in relation to the seven parables of the chapter we are considering?

For the first time in His history, our blessed Lord began, formally, to teach both His disciples and the multitude through the medium of parables. How natural that, out of those spoken, the Holy Spirit should select *seven* as bringing before us a perfect body of truth—a volume, from which the Church in all ages of the world, should draw its instruc-

tion! As seven consummated creation's work, so seven consummated the *new* creation, in presenting us with the seven parables as a body of Gospel truth. In the seven churches we have the channel through which it should be presented to the world.

It is quite true that in St Mark we have an eighth parable not recorded by St Matthew, but supposed to have been spoken somewhere about the same time, and to be taken in connection with the seven parables recorded in this chapter. But look at the chapter referred to, and you will perceive at once the design of the Holy Spirit in it. It is not to supply *another* parable, but to present to our view *the mode* in which the Gospel recorded in these seven would work. As these seven are designed to bring before us the rise, progress, development, and final issues of the Gospel of the kingdom, so this one is designed to bring before us the fixed law of this development. The Gospel is like a seed springing up *secretly*, we know not how, by night and by day till the harvest comes (Mark iv. 26-29). This is the *law*, the *spiritual order*, the *manner*, in which the "kingdom of heaven" in the seven parables should develop itself. So that this parable is not another added to the seven, but a supplement explanatory of the *manner of the working* of the Gospel. The design of the Spirit of God in this is to me marvellous and beautiful, shewing with what care He has guided every one of the writers of this Book and every stroke

of their pen. Truly we have made a serious mistake in thinking of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Reader, forget these names. They were but poor sinners like you and me! The writer is the Holy Ghost. His finger wrote every letter of this Book. His thoughts are in every line. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, coming between, have made us forget this. This is always the effect of anything, even in name, coming between us and Christ or between us and the Holy Ghost. It draws a veil over *their* glory. It draws us from the source to the channel. Oh that every channel between us and Jesus and between us and the Holy Ghost could be lost sight of for ever!

But what is the meaning of the numbers four and three?

The number three is that of the Trinity. It denotes perfection in relation to the special work and person of God in Trinity. Seven has reference to God in all His fulness. Three has reference to God in a special relationship—the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

The number four denotes *universality*. It embraces all the relationships of *this world* in their widest capacity. The four points of the compass, the four winds, the four living creatures, the four Gospels, the four states of ground into which the seed was cast—all denoting universality or worldwide application.

So in the chapter under consideration. There is seven denoting the perfection of the body of truth

brought before us for all time. These seven parables are subdivided into four and three. The first four spoken *on the shore* were designed to have a *world-wide* application. They bring before us the Gospel of the kingdom in its *outward and visible* character. In the character of the ground, in the growth of the wheat among the tares, in the great mustard-tree, and in the expanded leaven, we have the Gospel manifested in its outward aspect —its *extensive* and *expansive* character. In the *hid* treasure, the pearl of great price *found after much searching*, the fish hidden in the sea and afterwards separated from the bad, we have the Gospel brought before us as something *hidden*, and of *inestimable* value. In the first four the kingdom is presented to our view as a thing which can be *seen*, and seen by *all men*. The last three present it as something *unseen*, as something *to be discovered*, and the inestimable value of which is only seen by those who *search*.

There is one very striking instance in the Bible of parabolic teaching, confirmatory of this view, in the history of the "Search for the Lost" recorded in the fifteenth chapter of St Luke's Gospel. There we have the parables of the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the prodigal son. Its design is to bring before us the love of each Person of the Trinity to the lost, and the special work of each Person of that Trinity in the *saving* of the lost. In the first, the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, we have the work of Christ, the Good Shepherd,

coming down into our world to seek sinners. In the second, the woman with the light in her hand seeking the lost piece of silver, we have the Church, with the light of the Holy Spirit in her, seeking the lost. In the third, the father going out to kiss the prodigal in the far country, we have God the Father going out after the lost. Thus in this *threefold* parable we have brought before us the work of the Trinity, each Person of which is engaged in the great work of man's redemption.

But to return to our chapter. As these seven parables are designed to bring before us "the kingdom of heaven" in its rise, progress, development, and final issues, we should naturally expect a very varied and diversified aspect, a mingling of qualities of the most opposite character. And accordingly we find it. There are lights and shadows of the most marked character throughout. We see the three characters of bad soil in the first; the tares, the enemy, the rash zeal of the servants in the second; the *concealing* of the treasure in the fifth; and the mixture of the bad fish with the good in the last. These are the dark shadows. On the other hand, we have the field waving with fruit; the wheat outgrowing the tares; the leaven overpowering the meal; the treasure *found*; the pearl *sought*; and the net set free from bad fishes. These are the bright lights of the picture. It is a mingled scene—light and darkness, sin and misery, life and death struggling together throughout;

and the end—freedom from all evil, light without one shadow of darkness, and life without one taint of death to mar it.

Why are *seven* parables introduced to bring before us the Gospel of the kingdom? No *one* parable could present every side of that Gospel. There is in each parable something which the other *has not*, and *could not* have. As in the parables referred to in St Luke's Gospel there is that in each one which could not be presented by the other, so in these. No *one* type in the Old Testament *could* present all the varied aspects of the Lord Jesus, the great Original, any more than an artificial light in nature could present the sun. This is the reason the types and sacrifices and figures of the Old Testament are so numerous. They only give a few views of the great Original, different shades of heaven's great luminary. All put together are inadequate to express *Him*. Glorious as they are, they are but the spark of fire compared with the sun in the heavens. "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that *should be written*" (John xxi. 25). Well might the beloved disciple add "Amen" to this. Can you not, reader, add *your Amen* to it? Could all the books in the world even if it were filled with them, or all the tongues in the universe even if every blade of grass could speak, and every mote that dances in the sunbeam, could they all together express what

Jesus is to your soul? I think not, if you know anything of *Him*!

“All are too mean to speak His worth,
Too mean to set the Saviour forth.”

So with this Gospel, “the Gospel of the kingdom.” No *one* parable could present it as it should be presented. It has so many sides, it is so great and glorious, is so beyond all human measures of expression that language is too poor, and the boundless resources of nature itself too poor, to tell out its ocean-fulness. O Lord of light and love and mercy! let it shine upon every darkened soul, that the bars of sin’s prison-house may be broken, and the parched desert may blossom as the rose!

It is important to notice in these parables that they are all connected, and that there is a principle of *development* in each. In the first, that of the sower and the seed, man is brought before us as the *ground*. The character of the *ground* is brought out—the individual *heart*. In the second, the tares and the wheat, it is the *seed* that is prominent—the *character* of the seed, or that which *springs from the ground*. In the third, the mustard-tree, it is the seed *growing* and by virtue of the power inherent in it. In the fourth, the leaven in meal, it is the seed again, *changed by that which has come in contact with it into its own likeness*. In this graduated development of the kingdom we cannot miss the design of the Holy Spirit. The same development is seen in the three

parables spoken to the disciples in the house. In the treasure, comprising as it did *many things* of value giving place to *one* pearl of still greater value; and in the good fish, the *gathering together* of *everything of value* out of this world into the kingdom of heaven.

There is yet another lesson to be drawn from these parables. From the first one, the sower and the seed, the disciples might learn that of all their labours for Christ only *one-fourth* would come to perfection. This would be very discouraging. They would be faint-hearted and ready to sink. In the second parable, the tares and the wheat, they might again gather that even this fourth would be mingled with tares—with evil of every kind, difficulties, dangers, and trials innumerable. This would be still more discouraging. But in the third parable, the mustard-tree, the Lord seems to say, “though so little fruit will appear, though you will have to struggle with dangers and difficulties of every kind, and though the light of my Gospel will often seem as if it were about to be quenched for ever, yet shall the little mustard-seed, so small and despised, grow and grow, and spread and spread, till it shall become the shelter and refuge of all beneath the sky.” This would encourage them in their work, cheer their hearts for the strife, and send them onward with hope and expectation.

Let us now turn to the consideration of another view of these parables. Not only have we presented

to us in the number seven the perfection of God in His dealings with our world, but these parables are presented to us in *pairs*. It is deeply interesting to examine this.

To recapitulate. The *seven* bring before us a *volume* of truth according to the mind of God. Spoken by the Lord in the early part of His ministry, and with reference to that Gospel which He had come into the world to inaugurate, they are intended for all time. It is as if we were presented with a great *book*, one in which, as regards the Gospel of the kingdom, we should find every truth reflected. The first parable, the "sower and the seed," is of the nature of an *introduction* or *preface* to this book. There is that in *it* which runs through all the other six. There is scarcely an aspect of it which does not underlie, in one form or another, every one of these parables. This, then, is the introduction to the volume. The other six parables are divided into three pairs, each of these pairs possessing a *correspondence* and a *difference*. The first pair is that of the tares and wheat and the good and bad fish. The second that of the mustard-seed and the leaven. The third that of the treasure and the pearl.

Let us next notice, in each of these pairs, the correspondence and the difference.

In the first pair, the tares and wheat and the bad and good fish, the *correspondence* is that in both the bad and the good are mingled together. The

difference is that the tares and wheat shew us how evil is *allowed to grow and prosper* in the world; while in the draw-net the great truth is the *final separation*.

In the second pair, that of the mustard-seed and the leaven, the *correspondence* is the small beginning, the gradual progress, and the great increase of the Gospel, as of "a stone cut out of the mountain without hands till it fill the whole earth." The *difference* is that while the *tree* brings before us the *extensive* spread of the Gospel the leaven brings before us its *intensive* power. One shews the *outward aspect*, the other the *inward power*.

In the third and last pair, the hidden treasure and the pearl, there are several correspondences and several differences. The *correspondences* in each are—first, both are *hidden*; secondly, both are of *great value*; thirdly, everything was parted with for the sake of it; fourthly, their *individuality* is shewn in the circumstance that both seeker and finder is *a man*.

The differences are—first, the treasure is found *without seeking*, the pearl is found *after seeking*; secondly, the treasure consists of *many* valuable things, the pearl is only *one*; thirdly, the treasure gives joy from its *UNEXPECTED FINDING*, the pearl gives joy because of the value there is *IN ITSELF*; fourthly, the treasure is *universal*—"a man," the pearl *special* "a *MERCHANT-MAN*."

In conclusion;—In the first of these parables,

which partakes of the nature of the whole, there is a natural fitness of the kingdom of heaven being compared to *seed*, for that which, in a natural point of view, gives life to the whole world comes from seed. Thus this Gospel of the kingdom was designed to be to the souls of men what bread is to the body—life. Our Lord himself confirms this when He says, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.”

But not only is the Gospel the *life* of the world, it is much more. In the seed cast into the ground in the first parable, it proves the *character* of the *ground*. So likewise does the Gospel prove what is in man. It is the test of his spiritual character. What should we have known of the ground being rocky or thorny or hard or good if the seed had not proved it? It was the seed which brought this to light. So with the Gospel of Christ. It brings to light man’s real character which but for it would never be known.

But the Gospel of Christ is also *fruit*, and fruit in the midst of abounding iniquity. This is shewn in the parable of the tares and the wheat—the very roots of the one interwoven with the roots of the other, and yet by the power of God’s Spirit the heavenly character of God’s people is preserved.

The Gospel of Christ is also *protection* and *shelter*. This is shewn in the mustard-tree screening, in the midst of its branches, the birds of the air from the storms and tempests and dangers of

the world around. What multitudes of poor broken-hearted souls have nestled in the branches of the Tree of Life ! What a shelter it has afforded to the weary and tempted, the fallen and the outcast ! Small and despised, like the mustard-seed, in its beginnings, what “a multitude which no man can number” have found refuge in it, and have passed on to eat of the “Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God !”

But the Gospel is also *power*, yea “the power of God unto salvation.” This is shewn in the leaven. Just as its property is to assimilate that which it touches to its own likeness, so does the Gospel of Christ mould the soul into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. How it has done, and is doing, what nothing in the world but itself could do ! Education, reformation, example—what are they all in comparison, but “as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal !” How the Gospel has melted the hard heart ! How it has subdued the lofty spirit ! How it has made the one, whom no fetters or chains could bind, sit at the feet of Jesus like a lamb ! How it has changed the rebellious nature into pliancy, submission, and gentleness ! How it has irradiated the dungeon of despair and the chamber of death with celestial glory !

But the Gospel is *joy and devotedness to Christ*. This is shewn in the treasure and the pearl. How its treasures fill the soul with joy and peace ! How it has made men sacrifice everything for its sake ! How it has made life itself of secondary moment

so that the soul may win Christ! How all things compared with it have been but the foam, the dust, the shadow, the air!

And lastly, the Gospel is *separation, judgment, glory*. This is shewn in the draw-net. The Gospel points to that hour when we shall be no longer harassed by sin or hindered by foes. It bids us look out, while yet the dark shadows of midnight are around, for the coming dawn. It tells of a kingdom at hand that cannot be moved, and a crown of glory which time cannot tarnish. It tells us of songs sweeter than the sweetest of earth, melodies which shall reverberate through heaven and earth. No sin no curse no death; no crying no sorrow no tears; for “the former things are passed away,” “behold all things have become new!” Oh for the dawn of *that* morning! “Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly.” Amen.

“ Done with sickness, pain, and dying,
My Lord, with Thee !

Done with sadness, tears, and sighing—
With all sorrow, grief, and crying—
Soon, Lord, with Thee !

Peace, joy, and heaven—
Calm Rest !

Lord Jesus, quickly come !

“ Done with sinning and temptation,
My Lord, with Thee !

Passed the waves of tribulation ;
I shall know Thy full salvation,
Soon, Lord, with Thee !

Peace, joy, and heaven—
Calm Rest !

Lord Jesus quickly come !

“ Done with watching, working, waiting,
 My Lord, for Thee !
 With earthly joys, so vain and fleeting,
 Pangs at parting—smiles at meeting,
 Soon past, with Thee !
 Peace, joy, and heaven—
 Calm Rest !
 Lord Jesus, quickly come !

“ Done with last looks—farewells faltering,
 When, Lord, with Thee !
 With caring, doubting, hoping, fearing !
 How I long for Thine appearing !
 Even so, come !
 Peace, joy, and heaven—
 Calm Rest !
 Lord Jesus, quickly come !

“ Then soon bending low before Thee—
 Thy Face I 'll see !
 With Thy shining ones in glory,
 How I 'll sing Thy love's sweet story—
 Soon, Lord, with Thee !
 Peace, joy, and heaven—
 Calm Rest !
 Lord Jesus, quickly come ! ”



CHAPTER IV.

THE SOWER AND THE SEED.

MATT. xiii. 3-9 & 18-23.

"And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow: and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and, because they had no root, they withered away: and some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up and choked them: but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. . . . Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the Word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way-side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the Word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the Word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SOWER AND THE SEED.

THE first four parables, as we have seen, were spoken *out* of the house, bringing before us the *visible* aspect of the kingdom; while the last three were spoken *in* the house, bringing before us its invisible or *hidden* character. Besides this the first four parables are a *whole*. None of them can be regarded as independent of the other. They present us with the kingdom developed through four stages, each stage of which is in the ascending scale.

Mark the first—the sower and the seed. Here the leading idea is the *ground*. The seed tests the ground. That ground presents us with four different states of heart—four because of *universal* application.

In the second parable—the tares and the wheat—the prominent idea is, not the ground, but that which springs from it, the seed. This, while including the former, is nevertheless an advance.

In the mustard-tree we have not only the seed growing but grown to *a great tree*. This is an advance on the previous parable, while at the same time it includes both the previous ones.

The leaven is the climax. It brings before us the

power of the kingdom. There is a hidden power developing itself in the expansive meal. But more than this. Its prominent feature is that it assimilates that which it touches to its own likeness. Its *overcoming* property and *assimilating* power are the leading ideas it presents to us. Thus in these four parables we perceive a beautiful gradation, the *development* of the kingdom in four different aspects.

The three parables spoken in the house to the disciples present a similar development of the kingdom in its *inward and hidden* form. First, it is presented as a *treasure* found by a *man*. The treasure when found in the field generally consisted of *many* valuable things; in the pearl it is *one* thing sought and found, while it is still a man who finds it. And as it also *includes* the idea of the previous parable in being something of value, it is an advance. It is *one* thing not many, and that one thing "of great price." The fish gathered from among the bad into vessels shows us the final separation and the eternal blessedness of God's people. It thus includes all the ideas of the two previous parables.

Another truth may be suggested by this parable of the sower and the seed. Why should our Lord bring before us the Gospel of the kingdom under the figure of *seed*? All harvests spring from seed, and it can propagate itself eternally. So with this kingdom He was now establishing. It should go on increasing—increasing in knowledge in wisdom and in glory. It should be "without end." Israel had rejected

the Saviour. The harvest seemed to be cut short. By this *sowing*, or beginning again the first work, the Lord seems to say, "I will have a kingdom and a kingdom that shall never be set aside. Its subjects shall be the grains of wheat of ten thousand times ten thousand harvests, a multitude which no man can number." It was doubtless to shadow forth this universal character of the kingdom that the parables were spoken *out of* the house and *in* the house, on the *land* and yet in view of the *sea*, taking in the objects of air and sea. All shadowed forth the universal character of that kingdom which the "God of heaven was now about to set up."

Another truth suggested by seed being used is to show the character of the kingdom. Our Lord calls the seed the Word. All our words are seeds. They are little things but they touch the mind and heart, and, like the millions of rain-drops, each lends its quota to the harvest. "The day will declare" how man's most trifling and immediately forgotten words will have been seeds to another's heart, and through many generations, reproducing themselves for good or evil to multitudes. These word-seeds of ours have germs within them which only unfold by degrees, but which will tell their tale in the great day of God. If it be so with *our* words how much more of His who spake as never man spake! Christ was the great Sower sowing these words. Oh what a harvest of living souls will His words have produced!

But more. Everything in life is to us a seed.

And we do not need more than a seed to tell the harvest from it as truly as if that harvest had come. Extent or degree or magnitude add nothing. The present life, in all its endless variety, stands in the same relation to the next as a single seed does to the harvest. Our Saviour Himself is compared to a seed (John xii. 24). Truth is compared to seed (Mark iv. 14; Eccl. xi. 1). Man is compared to seed (1 Cor. xv. 37, 38). Man's life and acts are compared to a seed (Gal. vi. 7-10). You cannot cultivate one grace without strengthening another, nor indulge one sin without weakening the entire moral character. Each grace as well as each sin is a seed, standing in relation to a harvest. So also with reference to our least actions. The man who will be found in trial capable of *great* acts of sympathy and love is ever the one who is doing *considerate small* ones. The one is as a seed to the other.

It is the same with inanimate nature. *It is a continual sower.* You cannot go up and down in God's sanctuary of nature and providence, if only your mind and heart be set by communion with God to the receptive point, and not feel the penetrating and suggestive power of unseen presences. They are each one as seeds to the soul. Physically, too, it is the same. Evil is but a corrective process. Pain in the body is just a slight hint, a seed showing us that some mischief is at work beneath the surface. It is God's voice directing us to a remedy. So with every *trouble.* It is an index on the surface

telling us that there is something below which is out of order. It is a seed which if allowed to go on uncorrected will end in death as its harvest.

So with the Bible. Its words are seeds. There is something in a word which affects one mind and does not affect another. There is a spirit, a life, a power in each to germinate, altogether depending on the state of the heart on which it falls.

In looking closely at the parable of the sower and the seed and comparing it with that of the good and bad fish, we cannot fail to observe one or two important points. The kingdom, in this parable compared to a sower and seed, becomes, in the latter, fishermen, net, and fish. This is instructive. What was first the act of *the Lord Himself*, as the great Sower, embraces at the close *His ministers and servants*, as "co-workers together with Him." Again, it is no petty husbandman sowing on a small piece of land, but the Lord sowing on "the field," "the world." So at the close it is no small fishing-net drawn up from some lake or stream, but a great *drag-net* drawn up from the "sea." These little points bring before us the character of the kingdom which was now being inaugurated.

The *ground* which presents itself to the Sower, *on His arrival*, is also suggestive. It is one mass of hard soil, hidden rock, and thorn-roots. What a sphere in which to begin! How apparently hopeless! But, besides this, there are all kinds of *external influences* to counteract His efforts—a scorching sun, voracious fowls of the air, and other

kindred evils. Such was the world to which Jesus came. What a hopeless sphere in which to labour ! Men had all gone very far from God. Evil abounded. Rocky hearts and thorn-roots of sin hidden deep, spread over the world. Satan and his agents actively at work to pluck up every seed of good sown by the hand of heaven. Yet *here*, in such a field, grace begins !

Since sin entered, man's course has been a *downward* one. He has gone from bad to worse. The termination of every crisis, in this world's history, has been a culmination in guilt. The history of every nation in the world has been like the evening of each day—it has gone on from twilight to midnight. So is it also with the individual heart ; for the history of the rise and fall of nations is but the history of individuals. This is the first truth reflected in the parable of the sower. It is a downward course—a going from bad to worse. The way-side is *soil*, only soil so pressed down that the seed cannot penetrate. The second case is worse. It is the *unbroken rock concealed beneath the soil*. The third is worse still. It is the thorn-root hidden in the soil, poisoning the ground, and choking the seed. This is the picture of the human heart drawn by the Spirit of God all through the Bible. Mark it in the case of the unclean spirit going out of the man (Luke xi. 24-26)—“The *last state of that man is worse than the first.*” See it again in the narrative of the great supper (Luke xiv. 18-20). The excuses of the first two, courteous and polite,

ended, in the last case, with rudeness : "I cannot come." Observe it still further in the parable of the wicked husbandmen. Their evil treatment of God's messengers culminated in the murder of the king's son. "Out of the heart," said our blessed Lord, "proceed *evil thoughts*." This was a comparatively small stream from the fountain. But mark, as He goes on, how it ends in "adulteries," "murders," "fornications," and the like. Yes, the more the heart is proved the viler it appears. Man's history, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, is a retrogression. The "mystery of *godliness*" is working, but so also is the "mystery of *iniquity*." At the *close* of this dispensation these two mysteries shall develop themselves into two living persons—the Christ and the Antichrist—the Lord Jesus Christ and the Man of Sin. It will be the climax of all previous evils in the history of our world. Everything of previous good and evil will culminate in one point. It will be a conflict in which the issue will be all on one side—the eternal victory of truth over error, of Christ over Antichrist. Then shall "the kingdom of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ," and "righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." Lord, come, and tarry not !

" Words are lighter than the cloud-foam
 Of the restless ocean spray,
Vainer than the trembling shadow
 That the next hour steals away.

By the fall of summer rain-drops
Is the air as deeply stirred ;
And the rose-leaf that we tread on
Will outlive a word.

“ Yet, on the dull silence breaking
With a lightning flash, a word,
Bearing endless desolation
On its blighting wings, I heard ;
Earth can forge no keener weapon,
Dealing surer death and pain;
And the cruel echo answered
Through long years again.

“ I have known one word hang starlike,
O'er a dreary waste of years,
And it only shone the brighter
Looked at through a mist of tears ;
While a weary wanderer gathered
Hope and heart on life's dark way,
By its faithful promise, shining
Clearer day by day.

“ I have known a spirit calmer
Than the calmest lake, and clear
As the heavens that gazed upon it,
With no wave of hope or fear ;
But a storm had swept across it,
And its deepest depths were stirred
(Never, never more to slumber),
Only by a word.

“ I have known a word more gentle
Than the breath of summer air ;
In a listening heart it nestled,
And it lived for ever there.
Not the beating of its prison
Stirred it ever, night or day ;
Only with the heart's last throbbing
Could it fade away.

“Words are mighty, words are living ;
Serpents with their venomous sting
Or bright angels crowding round us,
With heaven’s light upon their wings.”

A. A. PROCTOR.

CHAPTER V.

THE WAY-SIDE GROUND.

MATT. xiii. 4, 19.

"And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way-side, and the fowls came and devoured them up." "When any one heareth the Word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way-side."

CHAPTER V.

THE WAYSIDE GROUND.

It may be asked at the very outset of this parable "Why does the sower sow the seed on ground that he knows will not bear fruit?" There are several very solemn and important points of instruction connected with the answer to this question. The Lord shews us, in the first place, the great truth of human responsibility. Every man who has once heard the Gospel has, from that moment, incurred a responsibility of which he never can divest himself. If he has not profited by the Word it is his own fault. The seed was in every case equally good. The fault of non-reception and unfruitfulness lay in the ground. This is why the seed is cast upon hard ground, rock, and amid thorns and brambles. All hearts are God's. He maintains His right to each one. He will not acknowledge the right of any other than Himself to any part of the field. He sows on the rock in order that, if He cannot reclaim it and make it fruitful, He may at any rate shew that it is His, and thus leave it without excuse. The love that gives the bad ground the opportunity of receiving the seed, gives, in the same way, the tares a place in His field that they

may become wheat. “ Some seeds fell by the way-side.” This wayside is a heart that had once been soft, but has become a pathway by the world’s travelling. Footsteps and waggon-loads have passed over it. Every passer-by has made it a path for his own purposes. So with many a heart. Every worldly care finds an entrance, every passing pleasure, every sinful passion. Each one, like the foot of the traveller, though it be but the light footstep of a child, adds its hardening influence, till the heart reaches that stage when the light of truth cannot enter. Conscience loses tenderness. The heart becomes less impressible. The man becomes indifferent to many a sin, from which, ten or twenty years before, he would have shrunk. He can listen now to the most solemn words of God, the most startling statements of divine truth, unmoved. They have become familiar to him. What can move him? Nothing. All this has come upon him *stealthily*. The treasure—tenderness of conscience, softness of heart, susceptibility to truth—has gone. God has been “ coming upon that man *as a thief*; and he has *not known the hour* He has come upon him” (Rev. iii. 3). Awful state at which to arrive! And yet millions have reached it!

But let us look at our Lord’s interpretation of this part of the parable. “ When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not.” Here we see that the seed is the Divine Word falling *on* the heart but not *into* it. The Word, like the seed, is that which makes a living link between the

ground and the sower—between the heart and Christ. But here there is no such link. That which comes from the sower's hand has no *hold* of the soil. The seed may stand as the representative of everything which comes from the hand of God to this heart, and which comes for the purpose of laying *hold* of it. But nothing does. Such a man receives God's Gospel but "understandeth it not," or "taketh it not to *heart*." He does not feel any relation between *himself* and that Word. So with everything from God. He receives God's gifts in nature and in providence, but none of them has proved to be seed *laying hold* of his heart. He has read the Bible and heard the Gospel for years. He is a thoroughly orthodox man and has always believed the Bible. But he has one fault in the midst of it all—he does not like you to *bring it home to him*. An *actual meeting with Jesus* brings a death-stroke to "the old man" within us, and makes us "new creatures." This he dreads. He can take everything up to this point. He can hold all its doctrines, contend for its inspiration, love evangelical teaching. But that Word must not be brought home by some Nathan to *his own heart*. At a *distance* it is the most excellent, most philanthropic, most divine thing in the world ; but there it ends. He has a kind of family religion too, but it is just a *traditional* thing. He has inherited it, like some piece of old furniture, which he would not for anything part with. Practically it is of very little use, but still it keeps his conscience

quiet, and that is enough. If one in faithfulness came a little closer to him, and brought that Word home, he would cry out with devils of old, "What have *I* to do with *Thee*, thou Jesus of Nazareth?" He has never questioned his orthodoxy for a moment. He is a good Christian; the world thinks him so, and he feels inwardly that its judgment is right, and it flatters him to believe it. Thus he is rocked into deadly slumber. Oh for some storm to plough up the deep of this treacherous sea on which the immortal soul is drifting to ruin! Oh for the winds and waves and breakers ahead, for the lightning-flash and thunder-peal to wake up this sleeper and save him from destruction! Reader, man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, art *thou* this sleeper?

The worst form of heart-hardening, the most deadly in its effects, and the most inaccessible to heaven's influence, is that of the *Gospel*. There are two effects of everything in this world. The sun that brings the deep-rooted seed to perfection withers up the superficial. The Gospel that does not *lay hold* of the soul has a more deadening influence on that soul than all other influences put together. We are cheated into the belief that because we *know* the truth it is the expression of what *we are*; and, after a process of time, it becomes almost impossible to disenchant the soul of the spell.

It is an awful fact in the history of the Jewish nation, and shadowed in the history of every human

heart, that those who *knew* the Word of God the best were the foremost in rejecting Jesus when He came to them. They knew the Bible, they read it daily, it was expounded in the synagogue continually, it was in their very hands when He came to them and His picture drawn in every page, and yet they did not know Him—they cried out with one voice, “Crucify Him!” What a thought! The Bible in one hand and crucifying Christ with the other! Ah! it is one thing to believe the Bible, it is another to believe the truth it teaches. It is not the *Book* but the *Christ* of whom it speaks. We may preach the Book and its doctrines, and yet murder Him whose picture is drawn in every page of it. To preach *about* Christ is one thing, to preach *Christ* another. If the Romanist worship the image of Christ instead of Christ Himself, may not the Protestant worship the Book instead of the Christ of whom it speaks? Paul preached *Christ*: the tendency of the day may be *to preach* that “Paul preached Christ.” Have not multitudes put the Word above the living Saviour? Has not “Nehushtan” become our sin? So is it with the “wayside” heart. It knows the Book, is familiar with it, contends for it, will have nothing but it preached—and yet *Jesus* is hidden. The cry of that very heart if the Jesus of whom it speaks were brought home to it would be—“Away with Him; crucify Him.”

Reader, precious above rubies as that Book is, it will prove only a millstone round your neck if

you know not, love not, follow not, the Jesus who shines through every word of it! If you would be safe, if you would be happy, there must be solid relations between your heart and the Saviour—not *first* between your heart and the Book, but between your heart and Jesus. *Then* the Book will be loved for His sake.

But observe, in the next place, the means by which the seed on the ground is rendered ineffectual. “And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and *the fowls* came and devoured them up.” Our Lord’s interpretation of the fowls here is very important. “Then cometh *the wicked one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.” St Luke is still clearer. “Then cometh the devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” Had *we* been left to the interpretation of the meaning of these “fowls of the air,” how natural it would have been for us to say that they were evil *influences*, bad example, bad education, the neglect of privileges and opportunities, or other circumstances over which the man might perhaps have had no control! So true is it that *we* never rise higher than second causes. So true is it that the teaching of modern times ignores the existence of Satan as a *person* in whom all these influences reside, and who is daily exerting them for the destruction of the soul. Not so does our Lord teach. He traces all up to one source—not an *influence*, not a shadow, but to a *watchful, active, living person*—“then cometh

the wicked one." If the devil be not a *person* the Holy Ghost is not. And if the Holy Ghost be not a person, there is no Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. And if there be no Trinity of Persons there is no God at all. We cannot *conceive* of a simple substance. No such idea can present itself to the mind from anything in nature. A stone in the hand, a leaf before the eye, a sound entering the ear—each one is a *complex* idea and can be conceived in no other way. So with God. We cannot conceive of such a Being apart from *Trinity*; and with Trinity there must be *personality*. So with Satan. It is not merely influences which are operating on every side of us. These are but the mighty workings of a still more mighty worker.

But what are the means he uses to destroy God's work?—"the fowls of the air." He is the "prince of the air," and uses everything within it for his own ends. The little birds hovering over the foot-steps of the sower are small indeed, but each one carrying away a little corn does its work in the field. And how appropriate are all our Lord's figures to convey the truth! As we look at the figures and the truths which He Himself makes those figures represent, no human mind could conceive any other figure so appropriate, or that could convey such fulness and beauty, as those used by Him. The figures He uses, when compared with the things they represent, are, in every case so exquisitely adapted, that none but a divine mind could have balanced them. This would, of itself,

form a distinct and most instructive department of Christian ethics, and is a striking confirmation of the truth of God's Word. Let any one try to substitute some other figure than those He used, and he will see how signally he falls short of the mark. Let us glance for a moment at these "fowls of the air." The first idea suggested is that of far-sightedness. How quickly and at what great distances a single corn-seed can be seen by many of these small birds! Thus we have presented to us the far-sightedness of the great adversary of souls. How well he knows his ground! How able to take advantage of it! How far is he in advance of us in discernment cunning and craft! What a mighty power is at work in our souls every hour of the day to subvert and destroy God's work! "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against *principalities*, against *powers*, against the *rulers of the darkness* of this world, against *wicked spirits* in heavenly places."

Another thought suggested by the "fowls of the air" is that the seed of the Word is taken away from the heart by the *little things which fly past us in each hour of the day*. It is not by something great and only occasionally recurring. Death does not often make inroads in the family circle. The famine, the pestilence, and the earthquake, do not often visit us, sweeping their thousands to destruction. It is not the *great* events that disturb the Christian's life or prove his greatest trial. It is the cares and chafings, the worries and anxieties of each hour. The thoughts, the words, the trivial

circumstances that force themselves in our way,—these pluck away the Word from the heart. These little foes, flying past us in every hour, are the destroyers of God's work. The eye falling on something may suggest thoughts which will banish from the soul every message from heaven. The meeting of some friend at the door of the sanctuary may issue in a conversation that will obliterate every impression left by the Word on the momentarily awakened conscience. Satan has ten thousand such agents at work on every side of us. And if those impressions be not deepened by communion with God and dependence on His Holy Spirit, the heart may soon become a *pavement* into which no seed can find its way.

Christian reader, do not lie near the wayside of things. Do not lie on the surface. You will feel the pressure of every footstep—even an infant's. You will soon become a highway trodden down by everything. Go deep. Let your religion be one of reality. Be not a superficial character in anything. Dig down to the rock and build *there*. Thus will you rise into a true building, ever higher and higher, and superior to every influence from without. If the seed had been beneath the surface it would have been beyond the reach of the “fowls of the air.” Oh live beneath the surface! Live out of sight, within the veil, amid “things unseen and eternal.” Thus will your life bear the stamp of the unseen. It will be one of reality, of power, of testimony for Christ. Thus will you *be* what others only seem to be.

Reader, the turning-points of a man's life are those in which the Spirit of God touches the conscience and stirs the stagnant waters of the soul by His Word. No moment is so solemn as that in which the Word is about to take effect—when the Spirit of God once more moves over the face of the deep. We are never nearer to God than then, but, on the other hand, we are never more in danger from Satan. Oh beware of trifling with this solemn moment! Think not lightly of it. It is a moment full charged with the issues of eternity. It may be the cross-roads leading to everlasting glory, or to "the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched." Oh seize the hand of the angel thus laying hold of you to drag you from destruction! Go and get alone with God. Ask Him to deepen the touch of His Holy Spirit on your soul. Ask Him never to leave you alone till you are His. Ask Him to keep alive the spark He has kindled from the power of your great adversary. Trust not to your resolutions. You are as weak as a feather in the tempest. The next breath may drag you downward. Your only hope is in looking to Jesus. Your only safety is in continually leaning on Him. His arm can keep you, but nothing else can. That withdrawn, even for a moment, and you sink like lead in the mighty waters. Distrust yourself though you distrust nothing else. Trust Him though all else fail. He will be true and faithful when every human prop has broken beneath you. Oh, trust Him!

“ City of the pearl-bright portal,
 City of the jasper wall,
 City of the golden pavement,
 Seat of endless festival,
 City of Jehovah, Salem,
 City of eternity ;
 To thy bridal-hall of gladness
 From this prison would I flee,
 Heir of glory,
 That shall be for thee and me !

“ Ah ! with such strange spells around me,
 Fairest of what earth calls fair,—
 How I need Thy fairer image,
 To undo the syren snare !
 Lest the subtle serpent-tempter
 Snare me with his radiant lie ;
 As if sin were sin no longer,
 Life no more a vanity.
 Heir of glory,
 What is that to thee and me ?

“ Yes, I need *thee*, heavenly city,
 My low spirit to upbear ;
 Yes, I need thee, earth's enchantments
 So beguile me with their glare.
 Let me see thee—then their fetters
 Break asunder—I am free ;
 Then this pomp no longer chains me,—
 Faith has won the victory.
 Heir of glory,
 That shall be for thee and me ?

“ Soon, where earthly beauty blinds not,
 No excess of brilliance palls,
 Salem, city of the holy,
 We shall be within thy walls !
 There, beneath life's wondrous tree,
 There, beside yon crystal river,

There, with nought to cloud or sever,—
Ever with the lamb to be !
 Heir of glory,
That shall be for thee and me ! ”

CHAPTER VI.

THE STONY GROUND.

MATT. xiii. 5, 6 and 20, 21.

"Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth ; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth : and when the sun was up, they were scorched ; and because they had no root, they withered away. . . . But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it : yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while ; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended."

CHAPTER VI.

THE STONY GROUND.

THE parable of the stony-ground hearer is full of the most solemn warnings. It is a parable differing from the last but differing in a far worse form. From the first it was seen, in the case of the seed falling on the wayside, that no fruit could appear. But here it is different. Everything is full of hope. The seed enters the earth and fruit appears. And yet all is deceptive. It is mere surface-work. Thus the human heart is presented to our view in a more degenerate form. We have had a hard heart, now we have a deceitful heart. Let us examine it.

The ground on which the seed falls is not a soil mingled with stones, but solid rock. Were it only loose stones hidden beneath the soil these, however large or numerous, could not hinder the roots from finding their way between them into the earth. It is one massive solid rock thinly covered with soil. This soil gives to the ground a fair appearance. But it is deceptive. The roots cannot penetrate. They are checked at the very first effort, and send forth all their strength in premature stalk which,

having no root, withers and dies under the first beams of the sun. The seed in order to bring forth fruit must have a downward and an upward growth, the upward depending on the downward. But here there is no hidden root—it is all show. It came up in a night, full of promise, and filled the heart of the sower with joy. It withered in a night, and left behind only a record of shame.

What is the cause? “And when the sun was up they were scorched; and because they had no root they withered away.”

Now let us mark our Lord’s interpretation of this part of the parable and its several lessons. “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended.”

Mark, reader, how solemn is the character brought before us. It is one who hears the Word and hears it so as to be *impressed* by it, and is so impressed by it that he receives the Word with *joy*. Oh, solemn warning to every soul! There may be softened feelings, solemn reflections, flowing tears, passing anguish for sin, deep compunctions of spirit. But will these abide? Will they stand the cold blasts of temptation or the scorching beams of persecution for His name’s sake?

And yet the sun which scorches the stony-ground *seed is absolutely necessary for growth.* The seed

cannot do without it. It furthers its growth, hastens its ripening, and fits it for the garner. That which ripens the true seed scorches and withers up the false. The trials and persecutions which ripen the true believer wither up the mere professor. Thus it is to the present hour. What are some of the solemn lessons suggested by this narrative ?

The first is from the immediate up-springing and rapid growth of the seed : “ Who, when they have heard the Word, *immediately* receive it with *gladness* ” (Mark iv. 16). The fault here is not in the appearance of the blade, nor yet the palpable form in which it appears, but in the sudden growth. The truth, “ as it is in Jesus,” when it takes hold of man’s heart, *must* shew itself. The law of grace is, in this respect, but the law of nature ; and in proportion to the intense grasp which it obtains of the heart, so the more palpable will be the form in which it expresses itself. That such expression will only the more call forth criticism is to be expected. A palpable religion there must be. It is not the striking form in which it appears with which we should find fault. We should feel thankful for it. In this day of expediency and concession, of temporising and false policy, a clear and decided testimony is what we especially need. Would to God Christianity in its *telling* character, in words and deeds, were the only thing with which men had to find fault !

It is a law of all nature that vigorous forces should act themselves out. We look for results

proportioned to the power which produces them. Do we not expect that fire will burn, that light will be visible, that thunder will be audible, and that lightning will leave a mark where it strikes? The most latent elements lead to a disclosure of themselves. Any great energy in nature, however breathless in its operation, must sooner or later be discovered. Electricity could not for ever hide itself from detection by some one of the human senses. Even while undetected in itself, the electric force must work, and its working be visible in results. As much power, so much product, is the law.

“ Why should not the same law hold good in the spiritual world? Shall infinite perfection express itself, and seem to find the blessedness of its being in self-expression, in all things elsewhere, and yet find no egress through the human spirit, which is so like it? It surely must be the law of God’s working in a soul to become manifest to observers. Such a law must act itself out in unequivocal effects.

“ Christian character, absolutely latent in a soul, would be an anomaly among the works of God. The life of God in the soul must tend, not only to *self-expression*, but to great positiveness of evidence. A renewed mind is naturally a transparent being, through whom the holiness of God reflects itself in human graces. If such positive evidence do not appear, a presumption is established that piety itself does not exist.

“ In this view there is nothing singular in the

charge of fanaticism upon a regenerated man. Such a man, acting out obediently the power which is within him, will never escape that charge, in one form or another, till the world is filled with fanatics. It was not much *learning*, but much grace, that made Paul seem a madman to Festus. ‘As for Chalmers, he is mad,’ said one of Scotland’s nobles, when that voice, as of ‘one crying in the wilderness,’ began to be heard in the wilds of Kilmany! It has been said of all ‘great thinkers and workers,’ that their power is a ‘force as of madness in the hands of reason.’ Vastly more significant is this of the power of an endless life, awakened and girded through the union of a soul with the Infinite Mind.” *

“ Those whose heads and hearts are full to overflowing of the great things of outward existence, and the greater things of the Spirit of God, can scarcely speak but they seem like enthusiasts and madmen. The laws of *their* being are those of a higher world. It is therefore essential to the success of strong and sensitive souls that they study all the arts of prudence and wisdom, in order to win their way and persuade men. But with the best oratory and ablest argument it is impossible for the wisest of men to speak from his heart the truth as he feels it, without presenting it in so individual a manner as to offend. It is to a certain extent his duty to do so. The scandal is not in the honest speaker, but in the uncharitable hearer.

* “Man’s Renewal,” by the Rev. Austin Phelps.

Minds that are equally positive are, of necessity, repulsive to each other, unless they are equally attracted to the same point. The truth as it is personally felt by another is, however, the very thing that a party-man needs to tolerate with cheerfulness; for unless he can so bear it, and even enjoy it, he can never be converted from the popery of self-opinion and partisanship to the truth." *

But while the truth must manifest itself, we must ever remember that it is no mere flash of light, kindled just for a moment, and passing away like a meteor, leaving the darkness only deeper. It is light entering, light increasing, light abiding, and "shining more and more unto the perfect day." The tree must have its stem and its branches; but there must be a correspondence between the roots and the branches—between the hidden life and that which appears before men. It is a truth well attested in the world of nature, that the spread of the branch of a tree is in exact proportion to the spread of its root. The one keeps pace with the other from the very first. It can stand the storms and tempests just in proportion to the strength of its root. So is it in the Christian life.

"The sunlight of a single day brings forth nothing. Such days come in December, in January, and amid the boisterous weeks of February and the tumult of March. But nothing springs up. The tree makes no growth. The light does not enter in. It lies wide abroad, indeed most beautiful, but nothing is created by it; for burnished icicles and frost-drops

* Dr Moore, "Man and his Motives," Longmans.

are the only stems and flowers which come from the slant and cold brightness of the winter's sun.

"It is only when, at length, the sun returns from its equatorial pilgrimage, and enters into the earth, and abides within it, that life is awakened. The earth knows his coming. In winter, nature lies as if dead. The sun stretches itself upon it, as did the prophet upon the woman's son, and from every part there is resurrection of root, stem, bud, and flower. But none of these things happen to casual and unfrequent shining. They are the fruit of indwelling heat. Not till the sun enters in, and abides in the soil, not till days and nights are struck through with warmth, is there life and glory.

"If this be so of the lower physical nature, how much more eminently it is true of the human soul, and of its Sun of Righteousness ! It is a gladsome thing in toil and trouble to have a single bright flash from the face of God. A prisoner in a dungeon may have but one small window, and that far up and out of the way of the sun, while for months and months not one single day does the yellow sun send one single and solitary ray through the poor little window. But at length, in changing its place in the heavens, there comes a day in which, to his surprise and joy, a flash of light springs through and quivers on the wall. It vibrates upon his heart still more tremulously than on the wall. Even thus much gives joy. It warms nothing, and lights but little ; but it brings back summer to his soul. It tells him that the sun is not dead, but walks the heavens yet. That single ray speaks of fields, of trees, of birds, and of the whole blue heavens ! So is it often in life. It is in the power of one blessed thought, in a truly Christian heart, to send light and joy for hours and days. But that is not enough. It is not enough for Christian growth or Christian nourishment, that despondency sometimes hopes and darkness sometimes smiles into light. A Christian is to be a child of light, and to *dwell* in the light. The whiteness of heavenly robes is the light which they reflect from the face of God. A Christian is to bear *much* fruit. This he cannot unless he abides in summer. For

mere relief, even a casual visit of God's grace is potential. But for fruit—much fruit, and ripened fruit—nothing will suffice but the whole summer sun.

"Now, this indwelling of the Holy Spirit is both to be prayed for and to be possessed. There is provision in the Gospel for this very blessing. It is the promise of the Father, and the pledge of the Son. It is made to be a Christian's duty to pray for it and to expect it. For, in very deed, there can be no true and full Christian ripeness without it. The soul forms no habits, and comes to no spiritual conformity to God, by jets and flashes of excitement. These have their use, and are to be gladly accepted. But the soul must lie long in the light; it must abide in divine warmth. There must be spiritual summer where there is to be much fruit. Our thoughts are like our bodies; men cannot come to good-breeding by an occasional entrance into good society. It is habitual commerce with grace and amenity that fashions a man to politeness. It is living in studious habits that makes a man learned. And even more, it is abiding in God, and having the indwelling of His Spirit with us, that bring the soul to good manners, if we may so speak, in divine things."*

Another subject suggested by this parable is the danger of an emotional life, and especially of an emotional religion. Perhaps no more striking instance of the latter is recorded in God's Word than in the history of Balaam (Numbers xxiii. and xxiv). As we read his life, we are forced to conclude that it is accurately drawn by the inspired apostle, in his Epistle to the Hebrews (vi. 4-8). Another case is probably that of Demas. St Paul, in mentioning him, couples his name with that of

* "Aids to Prayer," Strahan.

Luke, but in a very significant way. He says, "Luke, the *beloved* physician, and Demas greet you." Was it that he then saw in him that *spirit* of worldliness which was so soon to issue in an open forsaking him, that he could not say the *beloved* Demas? Be this as it may, no greater danger can beset the life of God in the soul than emotional indulgence in divine things. Emotions are right when they issue in corresponding actions, when they have corresponding objects to balance them. Every faculty in our nature has that which corresponds with it in external life, and is adapted to it. Unless the affections have suitable objects on which to exercise themselves, there will be a disproportion in the character. A re-action must take place; and re-actions are always dangerous things. There is no period when the heart requires to be more closely watched and kept than when one of its tides turns violently.

And herein lies the terrible evil of the light literature of the day, the craving for which is so rapidly on the increase. The *imagination* is wrought upon and worked up to the highest pitch, while there is no corresponding outward *action* to balance it. Thus one faculty is kept in exercise at the expense of the other. The outward act, not being exercised, becomes weakened by the undue exercise of the imagination. A sentimental and unreal character is the issue. Solid reading becomes distasteful from the effects of a pampered appetite. The man can shed tears over the history of Joseph

and his brethren, and yet have neither the will nor the power to break off one known sin. The unreal characters of life are the readers of the light literature of the day. Intellectual vacancy is written, as with a sunbeam, on the very countenance of a habitual reader of novels, or a frequenter of the ball-room. Solidity of character, maturity of judgment, the outflowing of the affections and sympathies to our fellow-men—all have been burned out by this moral poison.

We are looking at the matter in a physical as well as in a moral aspect. Character is thus ruined; and men who might have been a blessing to the world have become a curse. Such sensational indulgence has exactly the same effect on the character as opium or drink. Stimulants become a craving; and the whole man, physically, morally, and spiritually, becomes a wreck.

In order to have a healthy moral character no one faculty should be exercised at the expense of another. There should be a perfect balance between the moral and spiritual *emotions* and their corresponding external *acts*.

“The grief of the heart must be relieved by tears. One exactly measures the other. If it do not, there is danger to the brain. The blow has been so severe as to paralyse the nervous system, through which they should flow. Every feeling of the soul is manifested exactly by a corresponding expression in the features. Men are qualified to influence others in proportion as they are gifted

with the power of *feeling* lofty emotions and expressing them with precision in *face, voice, and action*. It is in vain for a man to endeavour to persuade others till he has persuaded himself. He cannot convince his audience that he is influenced by emotion, unless they see it, which they cannot while he is endeavouring to *imitate the action* instead of *feeling what he speaks*. The want of actual emotion in a speaker causes the sublimest truths, and the most thrilling relations of great facts, to fall lifelessly from the lips, so that the sentences uttered come forth like wreaths of sleepy mist, instead of living forms of light. The features when excited are so nicely expressive of the variations of mental emotion, that, by looking at them, we at once read the state of mind of the individual—unless indeed he artfully conceal himself; but even then the constraint will be visible. The skill of the painter is most highly evinced by his seizing the evanescent play of feeling which, though unstable as a ray of light upon the trembling water, yet, in an instant, reveals the emotion of the soul. It is the exquisite accordance between this index, and the intelligence that moves it, which characterises the man of eloquent features, and imparts, with the addition of appropriate language and utterance, an almost superhuman fascination to the gifted orator. Even without the auxiliaries of living energy—tone and language—the actions of the muscles of the face and eyes are marvellously fashioned to respond to the touch of feeling on the nerves.”

If this be physically true, and a law of nature, can it be less true in moral and spiritual life? If *emotions* endanger the brain without corresponding *tears* to relieve and balance it, will not an exciting novel have a similar deteriorating effect when there is no outward act to balance the mind? Can the round of sensationalism in which the youth of the present day are kept continually moving have no injurious effect on the character and on future generations?

And this deterioration of individual character, and consequently of future generations, takes other directions. See how the contagion affects Christian society. Look at our evening-parties of *Christians*, our drawing-room meetings for religious and charitable objects. See the low dress *exposing the person*, and yet with the Bible in the hand! Hear the buzz, the incessant chatter in the drawing-room, on all kinds of worldly subjects, just at the very moment they are summoned to bend the knee before God! Mark how every style of fashion is there—that imported from the French metropolis up to the very latest announcement in the *belle monde*! Behold the scene—a fine large West-end drawing-room, lighted up brilliantly, figures moving to and fro in the very height of fashion, the person here and there exposed in a most unseemly manner, the hum of human voices loud and continuous, with the Word of God in the hand, and the knee in an instant bent in prayer! What *religious* sensationalism! What a kind of spiritual *opera*! What a

burlesque on the Holy Book in the hand ! How revolting to a soul living in communion with God ! O ye *pilgrims* and *strangers* of the Lord Jesus, would He *know* you if He were here ? Where is the line of demarcation between the Lord's people and the world lying in the wicked one ? Verily there is no difference between our drawing-room meetings for reading the Word of God and other religious objects, and the opera or ball-room. Where is the "stranger and pilgrim" character ? Where is the *transformity* to the world ? Where is the *peculiarity* of the heavenly calling ? Where are the brands of the Lord Jesus ? No ; Christian society has caught the epidemic of the world ; it is becoming deeply tainted. These are the religious parties that *worldly* men call "jolly." How are the mighty fallen ! Ah ! God's people in the higher ranks of life must change their ways, or they will have to blush deeply when the Lord comes !

But to return now to the subject more immediately under consideration. The truth as it is in Jesus, when once it takes root in the soul, does not reveal itself in shocks of spasmodic piety. Its fibres take hold of the entire character one by one. Such a life is not inconsistent with many drawbacks, many mistakes, and sins, and falls. Nay, it is by these it grows in strength. "It has conflicts with sin, struggles with infirmity, through which the spiritual life may sometimes become a life of strong crying and tears. Yet, even here, there is danger to the Christian, arising from two similar

distortions of character. One is a disproportion of intellect, the other is a disproportion of sensibility. Let intellectual conceptions of God gain a large overgrowth upon the outgoings of the heart to Him in love, or let sensibility to the divine presence outgrow intelligence of the divine character, in either case the being of the man becomes disjointed. It will work unequally and inconstantly. His progress will be full of breaks and delays, in which his struggle is not with sin consciously indulged, but simply with the obliquity of his mental habits." Yet there is a power in the presence of God in the soul to balance and rectify all our infirmities. "It acts as a sedative to spasms of godliness. It tends to make a man *like* God ; and his being will not be made up of alternations between ecstacy and despair. It will be a uniform life, ever advancing heavenwards."

We have spoken much of emotional religion. Let us not be understood, however, as disparaging emotions. They have their purpose in the economy of spiritual life. The excitement which frequently accompanies the beginnings of life in the soul acts as an impulse to urge us onward. They urge and carry us over difficulties, which God sees we could not otherwise have surmounted. They are often the handmaids of the Spirit of God to this very end. Having done their work, they retire, leaving the soul under the calmer light of maturer judgment and spiritual intelligence. Such excitements are no part of the spiritual life—they are its accidents.

If they die, do not be surprised. They were never designed to continue. They have helped, under the leading of God's Spirit, to root the principles of the kingdom of God in your soul ; and their death has been but as the bud and blossom changing into fruit, which is far better. They are often the unconscious voices of God calling us heavenward. He called us in infancy, and perhaps we did not hear. Now, perhaps, He is calling us again by roused affections, strong impulses, and gleams of light darting through the soul. Oh let us not shut our ears to these calls of the Spirit of God ! If we do, darkness will surely follow, of such a nature, that nothing can enlighten. No darkness is so great as that which borders on sunlight. If ours be that of conscious resistance to past pleadings of the Spirit with our souls, then we may well tremble.

For *all* indeed there is hope, even to the farthest off in sin. But such a soul has closed the avenues by which the Spirit of God can enter, again and again. In doing so it has weakened every *desire* to be saved, and strengthened every hold that unbelief had upon it. It has forged fetters of iron for itself that were once only withes or cords ; and the strong man armed has all but absolute possession of the house.

But what is the immediate cause of the withering of this seed ? "When the sun was up they were scorched." Our Lord calls this sun "tribulation," or "persecution for the Word." The sun, absolutely

necessary, as we have before remarked, to the growth and perfection of the true seed, withers up the false. Troubles, trials, persecutions,—these are the agents which ripen the graces, and bring true character to perfection ; just as the midnight vigil, the trench work, the smoke and din of battle, make the true soldier of our country. A great writer has said, “ Difficulty is a severe instructor, set over us by a parental Guardian and Legislator, who knows us better than we know ourselves, and loves us better too. He that wrestles with us strengthens our nerves and sharpens our skill. Our antagonist is our helper. The conflict with difficulty obliges us to an intimate acquaintance with our object, and compels us to consider it in all its relations. It will not suffer us to be *superficial*.”* But observe, it is not tribulation or persecution *as such* that scorches the seed, it is “ tribulation or persecution *for the Word*.” So our blessed Lord says in another place not “ Whosoever will lose his life shall find it,” but “ Whosoever will lose his life *for My sake* shall find it.” There is much suffering, but is it because of the Word? There is much work undertaken, much toil undergone, much borne, and perhaps borne with perseverance and patience, but is it *really for Christ’s sake?* Here again, comes in the Christian’s one and only test, “ What think ye of Christ?” How does it all stand in relation to Him? “ Inasmuch as ye did it unto *Me*,” “ inasmuch as ye did it not unto *Me*”—these are the

* The Right Hon. Edmund Burke.

only words heard by the vast multitude at the great tribunal. The cloistered cell, the feet bared and bleeding, the sackcloth garment, can tell of suffering, but is it according to "*the Word?*" Does it spring from one only motive—love to Jesus? Ah! our long charity lists, our benevolent and philanthropic institutions, can all speak of sums expended on their behalf by men who gave it up when they could hold it no longer. But what place had Christ in it all? Could an all-searching Eye have looked down upon it, as the name of the donor appeared prominently before men, and could we have heard His voice saying, "Verily I say unto you, they *have* their reward." Reader, this is the test—"for the *Word*" "for *My* sake." All else is tinsel. It is *that* dear name which sanctifies everything, and the absence of it stamps death upon all. Christian reader, apply this test to yourself and everything about you. You are perhaps a man of prayer, of private prayer, of family prayer, of public prayer—

"Well, now, look at those prayers. Have they grown, do you think, in spirituality? Are your prayers unselfish prayers? Is it the far end of all you ask, that God may be honoured, and not that you may be answered? Is Christ really in His proper place in your prayers? Do they go up entirely through Him? Do you wrestle in His name, and realise His intercession for you, and His presence in you, while you are praying?

"Else what are they? Nature's prayers. Any heathen could offer up those prayers. They are Cain's 'fruits,' and not Abel's 'lamb.'

"Or look at the charities of life. And when I say that word 'charities,' I take it in its broad and blessed meaning. Your home fondnesses,—your kindly temper in every social circle,—your benevolent feelings towards all men,—your alms to the poor,—your support of missions,—your proofs of an amiable disposition. Are you sure that all this can bear the scrutiny? May not these things be mainly, if not altogether, for the sake of the pleasure which they reflect back into yourself? Can you honestly say that there has been an effort, and a self-denial, and a cross, in these charities? Is it really for the love and for the glory of Christ? And is it done in that humility and holiness which mark a member of Christ, because they show the mind of Christ?

"And yet without this, what are they? All, all are vain.

"Or, once more, you are one who feels sin,—its burden, and its pain,—and nothing, nothing in all the 'vineyard,' if it be real, so marks a child of God as this.

"But is it different, do you think, from what an unconverted man might feel? For God has so constituted the human mind that, to every one, sin is in some way or other a load and a grief. But are you grieved because God is grieved? Is sin hateful to you because it is hateful to Him? And is there in your sorrow a melting tenderness at the thought that you have wounded Christ? The love to Christ, mingling itself so with the distress of your guilt, that it gives a very sweetness actually to the very bitterness of the anguish. And are you recognising Christ's work to save you, at the same time that you are recognising your work in destroying yourself? Do you believe, and realise, and appropriate to the full, the sufficiency of Christ's atoning blood?

"For otherwise I ask again, Is this anything more than the sorrow which is common to all humanity? Is Christ in that repentance? And if Christ is not there, is it not vain?

"When Christ, 'hungering' for 'fruit,' found a fig-tree 'fruitless,' He consigned it to the awful doom of an eternal barrenness! What may we suppose will be the sentence when, 'hungering' still more,—even as He has a right to

expect more,—He shall find Himself mocked by the empty semblance of an unmeaning service, and by a Christian religion wherein Christ is not?"

There is another point of view in which I shall regard the stony ground, and with that I will close this chapter. The great hindrance to the seed taking root and bearing fruit is the hidden stone. This, *covered over* with what is *apparently good*, is the entire cause of all the failure. And what a solemn and searching thought is suggested by this aspect of the parable! In how many hearts is there the stone of some secret sin, covered over, indeed, with all that is fair and lovely, but still there, and hindering the soul from growing in grace? It is true that in one aspect this hidden rock is the human heart itself, "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Nothing can cure it. It is not something that can be remedied. *Everything* else may perhaps, but *not man's heart*. That is the dwelling-place of Satan, and in every man alike. There is only one way to meet the case—the rock must be broken by "the hammer" of God's Holy Spirit—the Word of God. Every other agency is impotent. It has ever shewn itself impregnable, bursting all man's Utopian fetters and laughing them to scorn.

But may there not be another aspect of this hidden rock? May not the stone of secret sin be deeply lodged in some heart, and long have lain there? May there not be some secret indulgence, some secret passion, some hankering after the world

or the things of the world, something that conscience, almost in a smothered voice, has long whispered, "It is not quite right?" How is it that some Christians never seem to grow in grace? How is it they are the same this year as they were last year; and in ten years hence should they live, they will not have made one step in advance? Ah! there is something within holding them down. And till this rock to which they are chained is broken, they will never advance one step heavenwards. See that vessel rocking to and fro in the harbour. It seems to struggle towards moving, but there is no advance. Others with their precious freights are moving onward—why is this behind? Down in the deep there is the anchor. How can she move? Cut the anchor. Let her be free from this secret drag on her course. So with many a man around us. He seems never to move heavenward. Why? In the deep of his heart there is the anchor of some secret sin or downward attraction from God. What is the remedy? Break the rock to pieces. Cut the anchor. Then, but not till then, will the soul move onwards to heaven. Then shall we see growth in grace in many a Christian who has been for years lagging behind. Then shall we see something of the image of Christ, where now all is but a blurred and blotted and disfigured epistle.

"We must be dull inspectors of our own hearts, if we have never discerned there, lurking *beneath* the level at which sin breaks out into overt crime, some single offence—an offence of

feeling, an offence of habit in thought, which for a time has spread its infection over the whole character of our spiritual life. We have been self-convicted of falsehood in prayer ; for, though praying in the full dress of sound words, we did not desire that our supplications should be heard at the expense of that one idol.

"Perhaps that single sin has woven itself like a web over large spaces of our life. It may have run like a shuttle, to and fro, in the texture of some plan of life on which our conscience has not glared fiercely as upon a crime, because the usage of the world has blindfolded conscience by the respectability of such sin. Yet it has been all the while tightening its folds around us, repressing our liberty in prayer, stopping the life-blood, and stiffening the fibre of our moral being, till we are like kneeling corpses in our worship.

"That is a deceptive notion which attributes the want of unction in prayer to an arbitrary, or even inexplicable, withdrawal of God from the soul. Aside from the operation of physical causes, where is the warrant, in reason or revelation, for ascribing joylessness in prayer to *any* other cause than some wrong in the soul itself ? What says an old prophet ? 'Behold, the Lord's ear is *not* heavy that it cannot hear. But your *iniquities* have separated between you and your God. Your *sins* have hid His face from you. *Therefore*, we wait for light, but behold obscurity ; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind ; we grope as if we had no eyes ; we stumble at noonday as in the night ; we are in desolate places, as dead men.' Could words describe more truthfully, or explain more philosophically, that phenomenon of religious experience which we call 'the hiding of God's countenance ?'

"It does not require what the world pronounces a *great* sin to break up the serenity of the soul. A little thing, secreted there, may dislocate its mechanism, and arrest its movement. The spirit of prayer is to the soul what the eye is to the body,—the eye, so limpid in its nature, of such fine

finish and such intricate convolution in its structure, and of so sensitive nerve that the point of a needle may excruciate it, and make it weep itself away.

"Even a *doubtful* principle of life, harboured in the heart, is perilous to the peacefulness of devotion. May not many of us find the cause of our joylessness in prayer in the fact that we are living upon some *unsettled principles* of conduct? We are assuming the rectitude of courses of life with which we are not ourselves honestly satisfied. I apprehend that there is very much of *suspense* of conscience among Christians upon subjects of practical life, on which there is no suspense of *action*. Is there not a pretty large cloud-land covered by the usages of Christian society? And may not some of us find *there* the sin which infects our devotions with nauseous incense?

"Possibly our hearts are shockingly deceitful in such iniquity. Are we strangers to an experience like this—that when we mourn over our cold prayers as a misfortune, we evade a search of that disputed territory for the cause of them, through fear that we shall find it there, and we struggle to satisfy ourselves with an increase of spiritual duties which shall cost us no sacrifice? Are we never sensible of resisting the *hints* which the Holy Spirit gives us in parables, by refusing to *look that way* for the secret of our deadness?—saying, 'Not that! Oh, no, not that! But let us *pray* more.'

"Many a doubtful principle in a Christian mind, if once set in the focus of a conscience illumined by the Holy Spirit, would resolve itself into a sin, for which that Christian would turn and look up guiltily to the Master, and then go out and weep bitterly."*

"If a believer fall into sin, that sin will immediately raise up a barrier between his soul and God. Whatever he may have enjoyed of spiritual peace and happiness, he will lose it, he will go 'far off.' That sin must, and will do its own proper, separating work.

* "The Still Hour," by the Rev. Austin Phelps.

"And be assured of this, that so essentially is this separating work bound up with the whole nature of sin, that one—even the smallest—sin, so long as it is wilful, and so long as it is continuous, will shut you out perfectly from God.

"And by sin, I mean, not so much the word we say, or the act we do, as that evil thing in the heart, which lies there as a deep secret spring, even when there is no visible stream that flows out from it.

"In like manner, as it is with God, so it is with a man's relationship with his fellow-creatures.

"If, at this moment, any one is not at peace within ; if your mind is unquiet, and your character wants that harmony—which without which no man has peace, and no man has strength,—depend upon it, sin is at the bottom of it. It is sin that is destroying the fixity and unity of your character. Let only sin be put away, and your whole being, set free from the disturbance, will consolidate itself. You owe all your secret weakness to sin.

"And no less, if any of you at this moment be not in concord with any man ; do not look about to find the cause in anything which that man has done, or in any external circumstance whatsoever. The root of the bitterness is in yourself. If you had been humble enough, if you had been patient enough, if you had been Christ-like enough, that variance would never have taken place. It is the sin in your own heart which has done it. Would any person be 'far off' from us if we had not done or said something to make a wound ? or, when the wound was made, if we had not omitted to say or do something that might have healed it ?"

Christian reader, remember this word with regard to all secret stones of sin within—"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." You may be one of God's children all the while—one in a *fallen* state—though, blessed be God, not one fallen *away*. But prayer in your

case is *useless*. It can never be answered. Growth in grace and likeness to Christ is impossible. It is as contrary to the law of "the kingdom" as to see water rise into the air! A consistent walk, a life submitted wholly to God's all-searching eye, a life, the aim and end of which is to glorify His dear Son Jesus Christ, this is the only condition on which God will manifest Himself in all His loveliness and sweetness to your soul.

Oh live; live prayerfully, watchfully, consistently, godly, and prove what a reality God is! Prove the fulness of Jesus! Prove Him thus! The soul that has proved Him thus was never disappointed and never will be. Only such a soul can tell what religion is or know anything about it.

"When my comforts smile around me,
When no cares or griefs befall,
Health, and hope, and friends surround me,
Joys stand ready at my call;
Jesus only
Sheds the sunshine on them all.

"When I walk through darkness fearful,
Where no glimpse of light is seen,
Trembling, terrified, and tearful,
Wond'ring what such gloom may mean;
Jesus only
Is the Friend on whom I lean.

"When the thoughts of past transgression
Rush in terror o'er my mind,
Mingling with the sad confession,
Sin within me still I find;
Jesus only
Can my broken spirit bind.

“When I view my holiest feelings,
What impurity I see !
By Thy Spirit's clear revealings,
Lord, I find no good in me;
Jesus only
Is my hope of peace with Thee.

“When the vale of death I'm treading,
Never to return again,
When its shades around me spreading,
Hide me from the help of men ;
Jesus only
Shall be with me there and then.

“When in heaven I bow before Him,
Trace His love's continued stream,
And in perfect songs adore Him,
Where His unveiled glories beam ;
Jesus only
Shall be my eternal theme.”



CHAPTER VII.

THE THORNY GROUND.



MATT. xiii. 7, 22.

"And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them. . . . He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the Word; and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word, and he becometh unfruitful."

CHAPTER VII.

THE THORNY GROUND.

WE have now reached the worst form of evil in the ascending scale of this parable—that of the thorns choking the seed. These are not thorns, but thorn-roots hidden in the ground, and presently making their appearance to the destruction of the seed. There is a beautiful fitness in this part of the parable. “Thorns and thistles” were the first-fruits of the ground in the beginning—the curse resulting from man’s sin. Being hidden in the ground, and springing up as its natural fruit, we learn that the human heart is under the curse of sin, and that all it can produce is only that which is antagonistic to the living seed. The fruit of the natural heart is enmity to God. Nor is this enmity a mere *branch* that, somehow or other, has become fruitless. No; it is a thorn-root. It is that in which every blade and bud and flower and fruit of evil lies, ready to be unfolded. Such is the human heart—a *root* of evil. And the more it unfolds itself the more is its character seen as that which chokes the good seed.

And there is also another beautiful fitness in the figure. Thorns were the only crown man could

offer to his God. It encircled the Redeemer's brow. Thorns, fit emblem of the human heart, was the natural offering when its God came seeking fruit from it. It could only yield that which made Him bleed. And as the crown is the glory of the kingdom, so they weaved these thorns into a crown. It was the only glory the human heart could present—a curse laid on the brow of the God-Man. That curse He bore. "He was made a curse for us." And now through Him, "instead of the thorn there comes up the fir-tree, instead of the brier the myrtle-tree; and it is to Jehovah for a name, an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off."

And the thorns spring, in this parable, simultaneously with the seed. They grow side by side. The good seed seems, to speak spiritually, to be the reason for the manifestation of the thorn. Abel's faith provokes Cain's enmity. "The world cannot hate you: but Me it hateth, *because I testify of it that its works are evil.*" So is it always. The manifestation of the character of Jesus in the life of a man is ever that which draws forth the enmity of the natural heart.

But let us notice the particular character of these thorns. They are presented to us in three different classes—the "cares of this world," the "deceitfulness of riches," and the "lusts of other things," or, as St Luke says, the "pleasures of this life." We find in these the three great sources of the Christian's temptation—the world, *the flesh, and the devil.* By these three the good

seed is "choked" or "smothered," so that no fruit is "brought to perfection." The word "perfection" here is a striking one. It is the only place in the New Testament in which it occurs. It is the word especially used of bringing a child to birth. So that the great truth taught by the parable is, that though the seed may make great progress in the soul, it stops short at the very point which renders it of any value—fruit. It draws forth the highest hopes of the sower and then mocks him at the grand point of expectation. Thus Satan, acting through the varied agencies of life, is the great mocker of God and man.

Let us now mark the nature of these three agencies by which the seed is rendered fruitless. The first is that of the world—"the cares of this world." The original of this word "cares" is derived from a word which signifies to draw the heart in opposite directions. Thus God speaks of Israel, "their heart is *divided*; now shall they be found faulty" (Hosea x. 2). It is that state in which the soul is drawn towards the world and towards God also. Now drawn in one direction, now in another; feeling there is a good in both and trying to serve both; not holding the world subordinate to the things of God, but while conscience will not permit the man to give up God altogether the *preference* is for the world.

But it is important to take, in connection with this, the second means by which Satan renders the seed unfruitful—"the deceitfulness of riches."

We have, combined, the poor man's cares and the rich man's wealth. There is the struggle for life, the pinching want, the anxious forethought to keep a young family afloat on the world's rough sea. Thus the poor man's care may as effectually choke the seed as the rich man's wealth. "Our eyes may be obstructed from the light of the sun by two copper coins placed before us as by two gold ones." It is this care and anxiety that takes such a deep hold on a man's thoughts, so that this world becomes the centre round which he moves. He is dependent on every side, his struggles are with scanty means, his prospects in this world are at the best circumscribed by his toils. And yet he has affections deep as other men, and ties to which they cling. Hence his ever-pressing anxiety and constant care. These things occupy most of his thoughts. What wonder if things seen outweigh things unseen and eternal? How deep the need of watchfulness and prayer, lest they shut out heaven from the soul! How does the life of God in the soul require daily, yea hourly, renewal, lest these thorns choke it that it bring no fruit to perfection!

But riches bring their cares also; and not only so, but they bring with them a train of evils from which the poor are exempt. "Worldly riches become a substitute to the heart for One to whom, alone, all supreme affections are due. They are present; God is unseen. They are means at hand of gaining whatever we may desire. Thus riches minister to

the corrupt inclinations of our nature. They promise, and are able to be, gods to us which exalt the worshipper, impressing him with a sense of his own power and security. They have a secret feeling that it gives them a footing to stand upon, an importance, a superiority. In consequence, they become attached to the world, become dull and dim-sighted to eternal realities, and become strangers to the cross. The great danger of possessing riches is the carnal security to which they lead. A life of money-getting is a life of care. From the first there is a fearful anticipation of loss, in various ways calculated to depress and unsettle the mind ; nay, to haunt it, till a man finds he can think about nothing else, and is unable to give his mind to heavenly things from the constant whirl of business in which he is involved. It is well that this should be understood. Money is a kind of creation, and gives the acquirer, even more than the possessor, an imagination of his own power, and tends to make him idolise self. Again, what we have hardly won we are unwilling to part with ; so that a man who has made his wealth will commonly be penurious, or, at least, will not part with it except in exchange for what will reflect credit upon himself, or increase his importance. Moreover, there is a considerable tendency in occupations connected with gain to make a man unfair in his dealings in a subtle way. There are so many conventional deceits and prevarications in the detail of the world's business, so much intricacy in the management of accounts, so

many perplexed questions about justice and equity, so many plausible subterfuges and fictions of law, so much confusion between the distinct yet approximating outlines of honesty and civil enactment, that it requires a very straightforward mind, and a deeply-implanted principle of truth in the soul, to keep firm hold of strict conscientiousness, honour, and truth.” *

Thus it is that by the cares of poverty, the riches of prosperity, or the pleasures of the world, gaining little by little on the thoughts and affections, that the seed is smothered and brings no fruit to perfection. Thus it is that many a soul has fallen from a great spiritual height into the mire of the world, the flesh, and the devil. “ It is the picture of thousands. Reader, is it yours? It is only a little while ago, perhaps, that you were walking with a sense of security. You felt everything sure underneath you. How is it that now you seem to have hold upon nothing? Promises the most secure have lost their power, and the Word yields you no strength. The very covenant you leaned upon has lost its value. You feel your feet slipping—everything sliding from beneath you. No truth looks to you as it used to do. There is a haze and uncertainty about everything. What is truth? Who are right? Is there any inspiration? Is there any atonement? What reality is there anywhere? All my foundations are gone! Am I a Christian at all?”

* Rev. J. H. Newman, D.D.

" But, reader, to all this there is a secret key. Christ is not to you now what He once was. The union, the communion, the jealous closeness which were once between your soul and Christ—where are they? You used to feel an imparted strength and joy every time you opened your Bible, and when you had prayed, and in all the services of the Lord's house. But it is all gone. Why? Simply Christ is not to you what He was when you first set out. Like Peter, you are 'beginning to sink.' You are going down into sins and darkness and troubles and fears, and all this because you are not simply looking to Christ.

" The result is evident. What was once below you is now above you. What was once your servant is now your master. What you could once have trampled under your foot is gaining ascendancy every day. You did *rise above* your 'cares' and anxieties; now your cares and anxieties are rolling in upon you again, and you are 'beginning to sink.' You had escaped from the currents of fashion and the streams of worldliness, but now they are all beginning to carry you away again, and to hurry you into the vortex from which you were delivered. You did accept fully the forgiveness of your sins, and you went on quietly in that calm confidence; but now your sense of pardon is lost, and you have nothing to work up from. Yes, reader, these are some of the 'beginnings to sink.'

" I will remind you of them. A loosening of

foundations, a light hold on truth, Jesus less to the soul, ‘other things’ gaining the ascendancy, the world resuming its old sway, no power over self, no power with God, no progress in the divine life, a gradual but sure going down of strength, love, life—everything.

“Oh, return, return ! Go back, and let Jesus be to you, and you to Him, as it once was. Those declining steps and sinking affections want the Saviour more than ever. And He is the same Saviour still. The same eye is toward you, as loving, as gentle as ever. Return ! Away from every wind that blows and every wave that beats ; away from the gulfs that yawn and the depths that will swallow you up ; away from your poor guilty self to that Jesus whom the ‘cares,’ or the ‘riches,’ or the ‘pleasures’ of this world have supplanted in your heart.” Return to that precious Saviour as a poor, guilty wanderer, and cast yourself again upon Him. Oh, where shall *rest* be found but in Him ? What haven from the storms and billows of life but in the cleft of that smitten Rock ? “Return unto thy rest, O my soul ; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”

“ The well is deep.
Look back into the purposes of God,
And scan Eternity. Trace to their source
His wisdom and His power. Fathom, if thou canst,
His everlasting mercy. Should thy brain
Grow dizzy, and refuse to sound such depths,
Confess thy feebleness, and meekly say—
The well is deep.

“The well is deep. Take for thy longest line
 The cords of vanity—the rope of sins
 Unnumbered. Choose then the heaviest weight ;
 Take thee thine own poor hardened heart of stone :
 Now plumb the depths of God’s unbounded love.
 Thy lead seems light—thy lengthened line run out ;—
 E’en with such instruments thou hast but plunged
 Beneath the surface of the tide. Below,
 Far, far below, in depths unfathomable,
 Springs undisturbed the ceaseless flow of love
 Embosomed in Eternity. Here rest,
 And humbly bend the knee, and own again,
 The well is deep.

“The well is deep. Mark now the wounded side
 Of Him who hung upon the tree. Haste thee
 To hide within that cleft; and as the springs
 Of living waters from the riven rock
 Gush freely forth, ponder the depths of woe
 From whence they rise. Behold that broken heart !
 Say, canst thou find the measure of His grief ?
 Hear that loud bitter cry from off the cross,
 ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me ?’
 Think of those awful words, ‘I thirst,’ when He,
 The mighty God, tasted the serpent’s food,
 And ate the dust of death. Search thus His depths
 Of woes profound, and worship and exclaim,
 The well is deep.

“Thus bursts the Well of Life from these three springs :
 God’s infinite decree; His boundless love ;
 And all those deep unuttered woes of Christ.

“Drink ! stranger, drink ! and quench thy thirsty soul,
 From out of depths which ceaselessly abound.
 The more thy need, the fuller still the fount ;
 The more thy thirst, the deeper still the spring :
 No sealèd fountain this ; no spring shut up ;
 But, flowing forth to every child of want,
 It cries, Come unto me and drink,—invitea

The heavy-laden to repose ;—cleanses
Whilst giving life, and gladdens whilst it heals.

“ The thoughtless sinner, who, at Jacob's well,
Tasted the living waters fresh from God,
Has yet to learn, through all eternity,
The truth of words she ignorantly spake
Touching Samaria's failing earthly spring,—
The well is deep.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GOOD GROUND.

MATT. xiii. 8, 9, 23.

"But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. . . . But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the Word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GOOD GROUND.

We have now reached the *last* of the four states of ground brought before us by our blessed Lord. The final parable is all fruit. So will it be in the history of our world. The world has, as yet, presented only that which is hard, stony, and thorny. The good seed has had its checks and hindrances and reverses. But “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.” The last form of the kingdom shall be one wherein dwelleth righteousness. It is so with everything here. Satan takes the lead, and Christ comes in after—“the Restorer of the breach.”

“Thou hast kept the good wine *until now* ;” “I *once* was lost but now am found.” It is divinely ordered; for by what has *passed* we mark the contrast, and are thus led to adore the “exceeding riches of His grace.”

Another truth is also presented. In the sower still going on sowing notwithstanding that the three previous sowings had failed, we behold the patience and long-suffering and forbearance of God going on in wondrous love with a determination

to save the lost. It is love which nothing can turn aside; for having come to seek and to save that which was lost, “He shall not fail nor be discouraged till He have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for His law.”

But what is the good ground which our Lord interprets as “an honest and good heart?” Is it so that any man’s heart is good? Let God’s Word answer—“There is none good, *no not one*: they are altogether gone aside; they are altogether become filthy.” Then what is its meaning?

The leading idea in this state of ground is that it has been *prepared*; and in this preparation consists all its “honesty” and “goodness.” And what has prepared it? The plough. The sharp edge of the plough has gone down deep into it. It is not like the wayside—*hard*, the plough has *softened* it. It is not a *rock* concealed beneath a deceitful exterior, the “hammer” has *broken* it. It is not thorn-roots *allowed* to grow, the plough has pierced and overturned them. Thus it is a *prepared* ground. Hence its fruitfulness.

And what is this spiritual plough which goes down deep into the sinner’s heart, and prepares it to receive the precious seed? It is the Holy Spirit. This is the figure under which He and His work is frequently brought before us in the Word. “The *sword* of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” “The Word of God is *sharper* than any two-edged sword.” “He which *searcheth* the hearts.” The *Spirit*, and the Word which that *Spirit* uses, is

the mighty instrumentality for preparation of the heart. Not the one without the other. The sword *and* the hand to wield it; the plough *and* the hand to use it. This softens the heart, this breaks the stone, this turns up the thorn-roots. "Is not my Word the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Then the Word, like the seed, *lays hold of* the heart. There is an *adaptation*, a *fitness* between the seed and the prepared soil—between the Word and the heart now. And that which springs from it is that which was sown in it—seed. It is none of the soil's production. It is the living and abundant fruit of the heaven-implanted Word. It is "grace *for* grace," that is, grace in the soul *corresponding to* the grace in Him who planted it. The good ground is no better *in itself* than the way-side, the stony, or the thorny. All hearts are alike, whether the heart of Judas or the heart of Paul. All are *bad*. The only difference is that made by the plough. Reader, remember this. Talk not of a "good-hearted man" unless you really know what it means. There is not such a man to be found under heaven. If the Holy Spirit were only to show you the picture of the holiest man that ever lived but One, you would be appalled at the sight. Do not start at the picture of Judas Iscariot—it is *your own* picture! And if you have not seen it to be such you are *thoroughly blind*. Your heart is a fountain from which issues at every beat *a stream of poison!* Away with all the modern notions of man's goodness! Here, at the

very root, God lays His axe. Let the pride of man rise up in indignation if it will ; let modern infidelity and sentimental religion and half-hearted hypocrisy rebel against the clear statements of God's Word if they choose—God will not modify one jot of that Word to suit the gilded “refuge of lies” under which you are hiding. “The heart is deceitful *above* all things and desperately wicked,” is God's unchanging verdict. A holy life cannot make it better, prayers cannot, reformation cannot. Baptism cannot wipe out one spot of its hidden corruptions. The Church cannot touch its virulent disease. It is the leprous house, eaten through and through, and which *must*—every stone of it—come down. And till you *see* this, and *feel* it to be the case with *your own heart*, you can never see Christ—never, either *here* or *hereafter*!

And this preparation of the ground before there can be any fruit is not only a law in the kingdom of grace, it is a law of nature. No happiness or elevation you can desire would be of any real good to you, unless you went through the preparation which is essential to fit you for the enjoyment of it. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. The life of the Lord Jesus, how precious it was ! Yet nine-tenths of it was given to preparation. Within the compass of this world, everything is placed in the state and order in which it is to fit us for some other thing which is coming after. Our sorrows are preparations for joys, and *our joys* are preparations for sorrows. If you have

great spiritual joy, it is God's hand preparing you for what is to follow—sorrow. If you have deep sorrow, God is fitting you to bear a coming joy. A man of pure mind could not go to hell—there would be no preparation. An impure mind could not enter heaven, for the same reason. We all go to "our own place" and our own people—that is, to the place and the people for which our affections and desires and habits have fitted us.

This is the law of life. It enters into everything. Is man's heart to form the exception? No reader. Every voice around you cries "No!" "Except a man be *born again* he cannot see the kingdom of God." And this preparation of heart can never be till the plough of God's Holy Spirit *cuts it through and through*, breaks it in pieces, turns it upside down, softens it under a deep conviction of its guilt and *ruin*. Almost every parable under which the recovery of the soul is described in the New Testament brings this truth before us. When the piece of silver was found, the house had first to be *lighted up*, and then the room *swept* out. The Holy Spirit shines within, then the heart is swept, then the lost piece is found. When, in the charnel-house on the plain, seen in vision, "bone came together to his bone" and they lived again, it is said "there was a noise and a shaking." So is it here. "Near by a mass of rock," says a traveller, "that had fallen from the overhanging crag which had some wild flowers growing in its fissures, and on its top the fox-glove with its spike

of beautiful but deadly flowers, we once came upon an adder as it lay in ribbon coil, basking on the sunny ground. At our approach the reptile stirred, uncoiled itself, and raising its head with eyes like burning coals, it showed its venomous fangs, shook its cloven tongue, hissed, and gave signs of battle. Attacked, it retreated ; and making for that grey stone, wound itself into a hole in its side. Its nest and home were there. And in looking on that shattered rock, fallen from its primeval elevation, with its flowery but fatal charms, the home and nest of the adder, where nothing grew but poisoned beauty, and nothing dwelt but a poisoned brood, it seemed to us an emblem of the heart, which is described as a stone, which experience proves to be a habitation of devils, and which the prophet pronounces to be desperately wicked. Once a holy shrine, now its beauty is all departed. The ruin resounds with echoes which the ear of fancy hears muttering among the desolate mounds of Babylon—‘ Fallen, fallen, fallen.’ ”

But mark, next, the conditions under which the fruit appears. We are told, in the interpretation of the passage by our Lord, and in the corresponding passage in St Luke, that they “ hear the Word,” and “ understand it ” or “ lay it to heart ” as the word means, that they “ keep ” it, and “ bring forth fruit.” Such are the conditions under which alone fruit can ever appear—“ hearing,” “ laying to heart,” “ keeping,” and in “ patience.” How

frequently this last word is associated with progress in the divine life! "Let us run with *patience* the race set before us, looking unto Jesus." "In your *patience* possess ye your souls." "Let *patience* have her perfect work." "*Patience* worketh experience." The soul grows through a series of struggles. It has its alternations of summer and winter, its valleys of humiliation, and its mounts of transfiguration. In such scenes of struggle and conflict the fruit is formed and ripened by the Holy Spirit. And here are the sources of *all* fruit to the glory of God—"hearing," "understanding," "laying to heart." These are the fibres of the soul, formed by the Spirit of God. What reality there is in such a work! What reality in such a soul! Yes, *all* is reality, for it is the work of God. Reader, are you "laying to heart" the Word of God? Is it laying hold of your soul? Is it moulding you into its glorious likeness? Oh beware that contact with a deadening world is not blunting the keen edge of spiritual life within you! Watch narrowly, lest the atmosphere in which you are daily living be one which is estranging you little by little from the presence of God! Is the presence of Jesus the *home* of your soul? Remember, if you are not abiding in Him, there can be no fruit. Oh abide, abide in Jesus! Satan will let you *be* anything and *do* anything if he can only keep you out of communion with God, lower your spiritual tone, and modify your decided course. All is over with you,

reader, if this is your case. No real fruit to the Father!

How strikingly God shows us the right order of all fruit-bearing in a single passage in the Old Testament. "Yea, He loved the people: all His saints are in Thy hands: they sat down at Thy feet: every one shall receive of Thy words" (Deut. xxxiii. 3). God thus lays His *whole being* out for His people—heart, hands, feet, lips. But mark which comes first. It is the *heart*. "Yea, He *loved* the people." Then will always *follow* the hands, the feet, the lips in active and fruitful service to God. O reader! is *thy* heart right with Jesus? Is *all* well? or is it a cold, dragging, miserable thing—a life that has lost its savour—no light and joy within, no testimony without?

Observe, next, the various degrees of fruit. "Which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Let us mark that these degrees depend upon the reception of the Word in the heart. Whether we be eminently fruitful, or only partially so, will depend upon the power with which the seed, the Word of the living God, has laid hold on the heart. There may be only few talents and yet the fruit be an hundredfold; for the fruitfulness is not in the *number* of talents we possess, but in the *faithful use* of them. And let us never forget that *the Word* is that which alone can make a talent fruitful. As that Word takes hold of the heart under the *action of God the Holy Ghost*, so does it pour forth

its strength and life and power into every faculty of the soul, and into all the natural endowments of the man.

There are three classes of people who bring forth fruit corresponding with this threefold description. There are those who "*mount up* with eagles' wings;" those who "*run* and are not weary;" those who "*walk* and are not faint." They are all fruitful branches in the living Vine. But those who *mount up*, who, while they work and labour for Christ, become more Christ-like, more *heavenly* in their work, these are the "hundredfold" fruit-bearers. As they rise nearer to heaven each day they are losing sight of earth's attractions. These attractions grow less and less. The eagle eye is upward and on the throne of God. And as they rise their cry is heard, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee; and there is none upon earth I desire in comparison of Thee." They are being moulded into the likeness of Christ by the Word which has laid hold of, and is *daily* laying hold of, their hearts. Here is the source of the "hundredfold" fruitfulness. Reader, never forget it. It is the Holy Spirit applying the Word to the heart *each day* we live, and that Word moulding us into the image of the Lord Jesus.

"Art thou a saint? And doth
Thy God thee own?
Call thee a child, an heir, a chosen one,
One with Himself and His beloved Son,
Heir of His crown!"

- “Hast thou the love of Christ
 Thy Saviour known?
 The love that passeth knowledge, the rich grace
 That stooped to poverty and death, to place
 Thee on His throne ?
- “Know’st thou the Christ of God ?
 His cross and love ?
 Then art thou severed from this drossy earth,
 Linked to the city of thy better birth,
 The land above !
- “Dead, yet alive, thou art ;
 Alive yet dead ;
 Thy old life buried in thy Surety’s tomb,
 Thy new life hid in God, ‘bove death and doom,
 With Christ thy Head.
- “Thy life is not below ;
 ’Tis all on high !
 The Living One now lives for thee above,
 The Loving One now pleads for thee in love,
 Thou canst not die !
- “Live then the life of faith !
 The life divine :
 Live *in* and *on* the Everliving One,
 Who bears thee on His heart before the throne ;
 His life is thine !
- “Pass on from strength to strength,
 Faint not nor yield ;
 With girded loins press on—the goal is near,
 With ready sword fight God’s great battle hero,
 Win thou the field !
- “No rest nor slumber now,
 Watch and be strong !
 Love is the smoother of the rugged way,
 And Hope, at midnight, as in brightest day,
 Breaks forth in song !”

—BONAR.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TARES AND THE WHEAT.

MATT. xiii. 24-30, 36-43.

"Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field ; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field ? From whence then hath it tares ? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up ? But he said, Nay ; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest : and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them ; but gather the wheat into my barn. . . . Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house ; and His disciples came unto Him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man ; the field is the world ; the good seed are the children of the kingdom ; but the tares are the children of the wicked one ; the enemy that sowed them is the devil ; the harvest is the end of the world ; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire ; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TARES AND THE WHEAT.

BEFORE entering on the consideration of this parable several important points of instruction need to be noticed. May the Lord the Spirit give us a right understanding in the solemn truths it unfolds, and grace to lay them to heart.

All the parables, from the commencement of that of the sower up to the leaven, are to be looked upon *as a whole*, and as a gradual development of the kingdom of God. In the first, that of the sower, the prominent feature is the *seed taking hold of the ground*. In the second, the tares and the wheat, the prominent idea is *fruit and its character*. In the mustard-seed it is *growth*. In the leaven it is its *power to assimilate to itself*, and in its character as bread, to sustain life. The wheat and tares show us the present state of the kingdom, which began in our Lord's time and is to continue till His return.

Looked at in connection with the drag-net—the last parable—it is most instructive. In the tares and the wheat the leading idea is the good and evil *growing together*. The drag-net brings before us the separation and casting away of the evil. In

the tares and wheat seeds are PRINCIPLES, and as principles SPRING up; in the draw-net they are *men*, and as men DRAWN up for judgment. The one shows the *natural development* of truth and error in the hearts of good and evil; in the drag-net is COERCIVE power and the judgment that follows.

Again, in the sower the seed is the *Word*; here, the good seed are the *children*—children “born again of the Word,” “clean by the Word,” “begotten by the Word.” Thus in this parable there is *progress*—the gospel-seed of the first producing the gospel-*children* of the second.

In this parable of the tares and the wheat, “the children of the kingdom” mean only those who are the Lord’s people; yet the phrase is applied to the unconverted; “but the *children of the kingdom* shall be cast into outer darkness” (Matt. viii. 11, 12). This is one important illustration of the two-fold application of words—their higher and holier application to things as they really are—their outward and more formal application to things as they appear to be.

Again, this “field” in which the tares and the wheat are sown is not the *Church*, it is “the *world*.” The world is Christ’s consecrated field. The fact of tares being in it does not alter the matter. It is still the Lord’s, and is for His children.

Let us now look at this parable more in detail. “Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field; but while

men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way." Earthly figures are shadows of heavenly realities. It is a *man* who sows the seed—who sows all seed. So is it a heavenly Man who alone gives out the spiritual seed. As in nature there would be neither life, nor foliage, nor blossom, nor fruit without this seed, so without that which alone Christ can give, is there any spiritual life, or beauty, or fruit. He is the Man from whom all life and fruit comes. With Him everything: without Him nothing. Just so, on the other hand, is it with regard to the tares. The sower, in this case, is not mere *influences*. It is not the force of education or example. It is not principles. It is ALL these, but much more. These are only streams from a fountain. It is a mighty source whence they all take their rise, a *person*, an actual, living, omniscient, and omnipresent being, limited only by one Power above him. He is "the prince of the power of the air." Wherever air is there is he the sovereign ruler, subject only to God. Yet all his energies, all his efforts, all his more immediate workings, are concentrated in the human heart, in the heart of every man living who has never yet been truly converted to God.

Yes, there is his kingdom; for *there*, under whatever religious or moral aspect, is a "*disobedient*" one, in whom is "the spirit that now worketh IN the children of *disobedience*." What an awful thought that every unconverted man has the devil

dwelling in him, *working* in him, and concentrating all his energies on him to work out his mighty plans in frustrating everything Godlike! Think of this, unconverted reader, the worker within thee—the devil! That much of what you think and do is excellent and praiseworthy only shows the more his deceitful working to accomplish his ends. He is the *serpent*, and uses all this. Yes, charity religion the form of godliness the church and chapel—anything and everything, if he can only shut out *Christ*: anything, if he can only keep you from feeling you are a sinner and from flying to Jesus as your refuge! Yes, he is all this and a thousand times more. Such, unconverted reader, is the one you have dwelling within you, and with whom, every moment of your existence, you are having to do. Oh that God would open your eyes! You have no conception of the state you are in, nor can any language of mine make you see it. Only God by His Holy Spirit can do it.

In the description given of this power he is called “**THE** wicked one.” The article is emphatic. Thus all modern notions of the source of evil being a mere influence are swept away. The wicked one is as truly a reality—a person—as God Himself.

And observe, it is said of him that he is “*his enemy*.” The conflict from beginning to end is between Satan and Christ. *Man* lost the battle with Satan in the beginning, and it became absolutely necessary that *man* should win it. The first

Adam failed and fell ; the second Adam conquered and triumphed.

Reader, let our blessed Lord's language, in tracing all evil to its source, be a lesson to us. It is fashionable now to deny Satan's existence, and to speak of evil as the fault of education or example. Reform, education, sanitary laws, will in time check this, and man will progress in goodness and righteousness and truth ! Such are the Utopian ideas of modern thinkers and writers, and of modern infidel philosophy. Ah ! how the subtle serpent-tempter laughs at these ideas ! How he winks at their prodigious folly—glad to see it and to let them go on under this pleasant delusion ! Yes, Satan is a modern reformer, and is adapting himself to all these ideas ! So subtle is the veil he is spreading over modern society that all but those who know Christ and are established in "the truth as it is in Jesus," are being gradually drawn into the snare. No ; sin is here, disease and death, baffling all human efforts to arrest their progress. Crimes unheard of stain the pages of the daily press, committed by men and women of refinement, education, and exalted rank. Fornication and adultery secretly practised in the high places of our land and to an extent that few people are aware of. All this, and infinitely worse, unblushingly practised by men and women in the highest ranks and excused as a *fault*, or at most as a little excess. Modern styles of dress and the usages of society pandering to every vile affection

in the human heart. Yet this is modern progress ! This may be the *world's* progress, but if there be one fact more striking to every attentive mind than another it is this—that in all that is Christ-like and godly society is rapidly degenerating.

And *Christian* society too, is becoming tainted with the subtle infection. We have spoken of our drawing-room meetings for reading the Word of God and prayer, and for other religious purposes. But let us advance a step further. Look at our modern croquet-parties dinner-parties and concerts, in all of which Christians largely mingle and are increasingly doing so. See how Satan has abused what God has given to be used for His glory ! The croquet-party, what is it but an assemblage of people who go to see and be seen ? There is the fashion and frivolity and flirtation and the *world* in its most attractive form—an outdoor ball-room ! At the dinner-table listen to the conversation ! Every subject forms its topic but *one*—for Christ is, by universal consent, an excluded guest. The conversation, in nine cases out of ten, is the most frothy or frivolous. The ladies retire ; and then comes the indulgence in wine, after which men—often *Christian* men—meet them again in the drawing-room in a state in which, by some effort, they are able to preserve themselves from the suspicion of intemperance. This is modern *Christian* society ! Let the world go to such scenes if they will, but people of God “redeemed from the present evil world” “bought with a price”

“strangers and pilgrims,” ought *you* to be there? And if you say “Religion would be out of place there,” then ought *you*, a servant of Christ, to be where your Master is not permitted? Oh fling away all such pleas and excuses! You are not glorifying your Saviour there. Your soul is out of communion with God. The spiritual life within you has undergone a chill. The Spirit of God has been grieved. You have nothing in your outer life that the world can charge you with, but your *soul* is wretched! There is no holy abiding peace and joy. You have lost the savour of heaven. There is none of it about you. You are a *worldly* Christian, and every hour you live you are living *to yourself*. Your testimony for Christ has gone. This is your state, though you may try and hide it from your view. But while you are thus living angels look down and weep over the wreck of your spiritual life. Oh is there not enough to occupy every moment of your time here? Go and work for God. Go into the alleys and courts and dens of our metropolis or large towns and try and win souls to Christ. Go and speak to that person you have so often spoken to, but have never, from very fear or shame, said one word about his soul—go and speak to him *at once* about it. Go and help the needy and desolate; comfort the mourner, do something for the Saviour who has done so much for you, instead of wasting your precious hours in frothy conversation at the dinner-party or in the fascinations of the ball-room the dance and the

song. Go and weep over the sin and wretchedness and misery around you, if you can do no more. This at least will be more rational and more like a Christian man than being found in scenes where your Saviour is deliberately shut out. Oh be more like Christ! *This world for which you are living cast Him out, derided, mocked, and insulted Him.* It is caressing and flattering *you* and you are meeting it half way! Oh change your course or give up for ever the honoured name of "Christian!"

But to return to the parable under consideration. Notice first, what it is Satan sows. It is darnel or cockle-weed, the only poisonous grass to be found, yet so like the wheat as only with great difficulty to be distinguished from it. This ruins a field of wheat wherever it is sown. This sowing of darnel is a kind of revenge still resorted to. In India, and even in Ireland, when a man wishes to take revenge on his neighbour he goes and sows in his field, during the hours of sleep, a kind of pig-paddy; and such is the reproductive character of this ruinous seed that it will take the farmer years before he is able to get rid of it.

But the tares, as we have remarked, so closely resemble wheat as not to be distinguished from it. This is always Satan's work to sow the imitation along with the true. The field, which is the world, is full of *imitation* wheat. Evil and error have ever been, in their origin, *so like the true* that men have *been unable to distinguish the true from the false.*

Thus Satan has succeeded. Were he to put forward himself and his work undisguisedly men would shrink from the snare. To imitate—this is his work. Be a Christian in everything but the *reality*. Be identified with Christ in everything but “in deed and in truth.” Come as close as you can under the form of godliness but do not come under the power. Be evangelical? Yes, by all means. Go to prayer-meetings, bow at the Creed, receive the Lord’s Supper, support the hungry the needy the wretched, read the Bible and have family prayer? Yes, by all means. Only do not come under the power of the Spirit of God. Do not feel yourself a poor guilty sinner. Do not go to the blood of Jesus for pardon and peace. Do not love Jesus and give up all for Him. Do not live a life of consecration to God and *entire* separation from the present evil world. Go to your dinner-parties and your concerts and your balls and don’t allow yourself to be disturbed but live a comfortable easy life, and go to heaven with Christ in one hand and the world in the other. They are all fools or fanatics or enthusiasts who speak to you in this way, or at best poor narrow-minded bigots! It does not do for a large-minded benevolent Christian to have such views as these! This, reader, is the “tare,” the imitation, Satan is so widely sowing now. No wonder such “tares” are *poisonous*. They are dragging multitudes along with them in the broad road to ruin! Oh reader, beware of this imitation wheat, beware of this “poison” ∞

your spiritual life! Live with Christ and for Christ, and Him only. One feature of the roots of the tares is that they so entwine themselves round the roots of the good seed that nothing can loosen them without *both* being plucked up. These tare-fibres are now entwining themselves so tightly round the roots of Christians that many will be “ashamed before Him at His coming!”

And *when* does Satan sow these tares? “While men slept.” The great deceiver takes advantage of the *darkness*. When the weakness of man needs repose, when he is *off his guard*,—less watchful less prayerful less vigilant less spiritually minded—these are the Christian’s hours of sleep or of darkness. Then the great adversary, ever wakeful and watchful, comes. Christian, if you are out of communion with God, if you are not wakeful and watchful and prayerful, darkness is over you and the foe is near! His power over you will be seen in your leaning towards something *like* God but not altogether *of* God. The scale will turn, it may be only very slightly, but it will be from the strictness and hardness and isolation of the cross of Christ to something that, while it will leave you the *name* of Christian, will drag down your soul and dim your testimony for Jesus. Oh as you value your soul, as you love the Lord Jesus, as you would desire to meet His glad welcome when He comes—beware of the *imitation* but yet poison!

Observe next that the enemy, having sown the

tares, "went his way." He craftily conceals his presence—hides himself in the dark—for from the darkness he had come. He "went his way." He needed not to stay and look after *his* seed. It needed no watching. It was indigenous. The Lord's wheat needs constant watchfulness and care; but Satan's seed needs none. The natural heart of man and the world in which we live are adapted to him and he to them, for "the whole world lieth in the wicked one." He "went his way," satisfied that all would be well. *He* could afford to leave the seed to itself though *Christ* could not leave His.

"But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." The fruit of each is seen by contrast, for "by their fruits ye shall know them." When the fruit of the believer is manifested then also is the fruit of the ungodly. The holiness of the one draws out the enmity of the other. Thus both are manifested. So long as you do not show Christ—the only fruit in a believer which God recognises—so long the fruit of the tare will not manifest itself. But show forth Christ and with it will be seen the fruit of the evil one in opposition.

This parable also teaches us that we cannot judge, in the early part of the soul's history, what it may be. We must have patience and let everything mature. Many a blade of tare looks like an ear of wheat. Many an ear of wheat looks like a tare. Bring them to the test. Let them

develop themselves. Is Christ there in the power of the Holy Spirit?—there will be opposition. Now you see, in spite of all previous appearances, to which side each belongs.

Again, we are taught to be very careful in the matter of real conversion to God. There may be much like conversion which is, after all, only counterfeit, much like "wheat" which is only "tare." On no subject have we greater need to be on our guard. On no subject are there so many counterfeits. The words of a writer to whom I have already alluded are worthy of deep and prayerful attention—

"Let us, then, for our practical instruction, observe several mental and moral changes with which conversion is often confounded. Observe, briefly, that a change of external deportment is not the chief result of regeneration. No matter how pervasive that change may be, it can bear no comparison with religious conversion. When a man who has been addicted to sensual vice becomes a sober man, a chaste man, an industrious man, a good citizen, a kind father, brother, son, there is a notable change. It is a real change in character. It is a change for which a man deserves to be respected. But that is not a change which fills up the language of the Scriptures in designating the translation of a man into the kingdom of God. In other words, conversion and reformation are not synonymous.

"Again, no increase of seriousness of mental habit is synonymous with religious conversion. A young man often experiences, as the natural result of expanding intellect, an increase of thoughtfulness. When he was a child he thought as a child; now he has put away childish things. Manly thought awakens manly sensibility. He acquires some sense of the *reality of life* as a conflict. A certain dignity of character is

formed, which is as natural a growth of manhood upon the stock of youth as the addition of a cubit to the stature of an infant. It is indeed a valuable change, a change necessary to success in life, a change which will command respect, as it deserves respect ; but it is not conversion. No growth of earnestness is synonymous with that new birth which a soul experiences under the regenerating act of God.

“Further, the abandonment of any single passion does not constitute conversion. Such a change as this often occurs as the fruit of increasing years. Often the effect is to mellow a man’s character, by substituting for a turbulent vice one more mild and comely, and yet a vice as deeply seated, as odious to God. Warren Hastings, after his ambition had burnt itself out in India, realised the favourite dream of his youth, by returning to spend his old age in the homestead where his ancestors had lived in luxury. Here was a change, indeed. It must have involved in some sort a change in character. It was an abandonment of a fiery passion for a harmless indulgence of an aged man’s love of repose. But this obviously is no such change as the Word of God portrays by the emblem of the dawn of light on a benighted wanderer.

“Once more, conversion is not the development of character by natural germination in the heart. Character often undergoes a change by which qualities long concealed spring to light under a change of circumstance. Traits of generous manhood, the germs of which have been repressed, shoot up thriftily under improved discipline. Energies which have slumbered are roused by emergencies. No man knows the compass of his own nature till it has been distended by some great sorrow or great opportunity for achievement. Such facts in life tempt us to self-conceit respecting the hidden nobleness of man. Much of the religion of literature is founded upon the idea of concealed virtue. A divinity is imagined to dwell within us, and to be awaiting only the incitement of occasion or the felicity of circumstance to develop itself in all that man should desire or respect in

character. Yet no such change as this can be the complement of the scriptural conception of that revulsion of character which is no less than resurrection from the dead.

“What a satire on developed goodness in man is expressed in the tone of the Scriptures towards the best embodiment of the natural virtues! Breathe into Nature’s good man the most comely of her graces; educate in him the most refined of her sensibilities; develop in him the most magnanimous of her impulses; fashion in him the most docile obedience to her teachings; nurture in him the most elegant and placid of her tastes, so that to the silken judgment of the world his character shall seem to be a paragon of beauty, “fair as a star when only one is shining in the sky;” yet, if that fascinating being—that young man of whom it shall be said that Jesus, beholding him, loved him—has not been changed by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, the honest eye of God sees him as a naked soul in bondage to the prince of the power of the air.”*

Mark next, the request of the disciples on finding tares among the wheat and our Lord’s reply. “Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But He said Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares ye root up also the wheat with them: let both grow together till the harvest.” The desire to have a pure and perfect world, or a pure and perfect Church, is only natural on the part of God’s children. But the Lord shows us by His answer that neither is to be in this world; that imperfection and sin will, and *must*, mingle together till the end of this age. Every effort to have a pure world or a perfect Church has recoiled on the promoters in a very marked manner.

* “*Man’s Renewal*,” by the Rev. Austen Phelps.

Those who have begun by excluding from the Church men whom they judged were not believers have ended, *in every case*, by admitting the unworthy and excluding the true. Our Lord shews by His reply, the reason the disciples were not to do this. He seems to say “ You are not the fit persons to do it. You would pluck up the wheat in your zeal to uproot the tares.” And this we know by painful experience has always been the case. It has been the history of every Church that has ever risen ; and by this very mistake each has in succession been dashed to pieces—a standing monument of the displeasure of God for taking into *their* hands that prerogative which belongs only to Himself.

Besides which it is *absolutely necessary* that both should grow, and not only grow, but “ grow *together*.” This mixed condition of things has ever been God’s design. It was set forth in type by Noah’s ark, which contained clean and unclean ; in vision, by the sheet which Peter saw let down from heaven ; in comparison, by the threshing-floor whereon lay both wheat and chaff; in parable; by the net which contained fish good and bad ; and here, by tares growing among the wheat.

In the present state of things we cannot conceive how it could be otherwise. It is the opposition and persecution of evil that exercises the graces of love and meekness and forbearance of the believer, and by thus exercising them, moulds him into the likeness of the Lord. But for such trials how

should we know such graces or how would the believer be ripened for heaven? All nature teaches us the same divine lesson. What should we know of health if we had not disease, of rest without labour, of joy without sorrow? We gaze with admiration on the beauteous sky because we have seen its contrast in the darkened heavens and the gloom of midnight. The bane and the antidote grow together in the brook, and beauty, in every form, borrows its character from the deformities with which we are familiar. *How could it be otherwise?* Sin and sorrow, disease and death will not exist ere long, but *sinless* contrasts will, or there could be no life or beauty in heaven. Yes, "let both grow together." They are necessary the one to the other. By the close contact of the one the tares will be left without excuse when the Son comes—they will be "speechless." By the intermingling of the other the wheat will be fitted for the garner, and will shine all the brighter in glory from the trials to which they have been subjected here. The wicked are preserved for the sake of the godly who mingle with them. But for them they would be consumed in a moment. For what owner of his field would have the tares in it if he could, with safety to the wheat, uproot them?

But mark the tender, gracious reasons assigned by the Lord why they are not to uproot the tares. "Lest ye root up also the wheat with them." The Lord would rather all the tares should cover the field until the harvest, than that *one* ear of

wheat should be plucked up. Mark, dear Christian reader, His tender, loving care for you implied in this. Yes, weak sinful worm though you are, such is His love, such His watchfulness over you and care for you. "None shall pluck them out of my hand." The zeal of the *servant* would do this as well as the enmity of the *foe*, if the Lord had not "graven them on the palms of His hands." Such has ever been His care over each one of us ever since we knew Him. His love has encompassed us on every side and has been the pavilion in which we have ever been enshrouded.

And thus, while the tares and the wheat grow side by side, each one is ripening for "*his own place*." The true seed from the hand of the heavenly Sower is fitting for the barn. The counterfeit tare is fitting each day for the furnace. Every soul around us belongs to one or the other of these classes. How solemn, as we walk along the streets and look at each heir of immortality, —how solemn the thought that every moment each one is passing through a process fitting him for "*his own place*" and his own people! No law of nature is more absolute than this in the kingdom of grace. And as years pass over the heads of each there is no fact more certain than that there is a development of the nature of each—a *ripening*. Thoughts, words, and deeds, the sounds which enter the ear, and the objects which present themselves to the eye, are every moment leaving impressions on the soul—each one fixing that charac-

ter which we shall bear throughout the countless ages of eternity—the unrenewed nature in the one case and the renewed in the other, giving shape and character to each impression, and each, by a kind of rebound, forming the warp and texture of that nature for final judgment.

I feel it will be instructive and deeply interesting to the reader to give the thoughts of another on this subject :—

“ Evil inscribes its autographs and coin-marks on the life of the evil-doer. You can easily recall illustrations of this law. You have seen crossing your path on the highway, or flitting past you in the crowd, beings so abject and full of misery, so bloated and unsightly, as to have flashed into your minds a momentary doubt whether they were human beings at all. Almost the form of humanity was gone. There was a crouching and a dimness upon the moving mass. For the erect and comely elasticity of the human frame there was the ungainly and angular movements of worms and certain beasts of burden. The light of the countenance was quenched. The eyes were sunk. The lips had lost their curves of decision, and an impression of brutishness came out upon you from every other feature. You knew the secret of such phenomena. You do not hesitate to account for the debasement of the outer form by a foregoing debasement of the form within. First the character of the soul broke down, and then the character of the body. First the man separated himself from that life which, if he had retained, would have put forth the beautiful features, the strength and style of a higher being ; then the absence of that inner life was followed by the destroying forces of inner death ; then the moral scaffolding being rotted away, the unsanctified body, like an uncompleted arch, descended into lower and more hopeless ruin.

“ In the majority of cases, indeed, this debasement of the

outer form, under the influence of evil, does not reveal itself to the common eye. Preservative influences from without, food, clothing, polished society, gymnastics, may do much to keep the lustre in the eye and the radiance upon the cheek. But it is only in appearance. Beneath the outward polish and unbedimmed exterior there is vital bedimment, debasement, mouldering away. It was of such the Lord was speaking when He said, ‘Give not that which is holy unto the dogs ; neither cast ye your pearls before swine.’ It was human dogs, human swine He meant. The form of the spirit regulates that of the body. The dog-spirit has the dog-body. The swine-spirit has the swine-body. The inner name or character writes its corresponding name or character without.*

“But this law does not manifest itself in debasing influences alone. Ever, either above or below, spirit presses into form, into outer and visible form. The walk of the sluggard is literally, as some anatomists have defined, all walking ‘a falling forward ;’ that of the industrious man is a tread. The brow of a man of thought has thought written upon it : a brow of equal size on a man who lets his mind lie waste, looks little and inexpressive. Industry, thought, every fact of the formed soul within, writes a corresponding fact upon the formed body without.

“All human life is subject to these inscriptions, and all portions, and spheres of life. The illustrations are endless. Take a single faculty and see how it takes on the taint and signature of evil. Take that divinest faculty of our being —imagination. You can see what it was intended to be in our life if you examine its first ministries in the life of a child. It is the blessed gift which clothes the common things of earth with celestial light, and imparts the glory and freshness of a dream to everything we see. It turns the plainest home into a palace, and converts the streets of the town we were born in, or the bare heath we go out to play

* “The ‘dogs’ are the unclean, the utterly and shamelessly sunken in impure lusts (Rev. xxii. 15) ; the ‘swine,’ the bitter and fierce opponents of the truth of God.”—*Trench.*

upon, into a wonder world. It opens the gates of the beautiful on every side of us, and takes us by a thousand avenues into lands flowing with milk and honey. It is the angel of God leading us up and down the beautiful groves and flower-painted streets of Paradise. It makes the half a greater thing than the whole. Under its teaching we see a world filled with rainbows, and stars, and brooks, and trees, and lambs frisking on the lea, and birds mounting into the air, and bees gathering honey out of flowers, and the good God and the holy angels walking up and down in the midst of all.

"Let the possessor of this divine faculty pass under the yoke of an impure or worldly passion. The imagination does not cease to work, but its direction is changed. It opens the doorways of heaven no more—no more introduces the soul into the company of angels. It becomes the handmaid of the evil passion, goes out into foul places, brings back pictures and visions of vileness, vile thoughts and vile songs, and opens up a world of evil closed to the pure soul. That which was sent to be an angel of God in the soul, becomes a hewer of wood and a drawer of water in the lowest and foulest levels of life.

"Take a single victim of sin apart, and examine him narrowly. Let him be one who is leading a licentious life. Look into his eyes, his face, his personal form and bearing. It may be years before he shall be summoned to his final doom, yet he is a parchment already written over with divine retribution. Within and without, over all his being, thousands of intersecting spots and lines tell the same story. His eyes are bloodshot, his skin is shrivelled, his bones are rotten, his lungs are diseased, his brain is on fire, or the fire is burnt out, and a palsy is trickling down his nerves; wrinkles which the eye cannot see syllable his life on all the tissues of his body; and in eye and ear, heart and limb, aches and spasms and impotences, *which pass for other things*, illustrate the handwriting of evil, and tell to those who know the language, as plainly as if it were written in English characters,

that this is a man who is living under the doom of the Lord.

"It is the same with social wickedness. Long before the last shock of judgment falls, the retribution has begun to descend. Like a poison in the air, or a pestilence in the city, the evil which belongs to a community shows itself by a trail of judgments. It kills out truth, or nobleness, or purity, or reverence, from the national character. It puts its mark like some death-spot upon the face of the community. The evil-doer becomes *the evil* which he does. Just as children of light are changed by the light into actual light, so the children of darkness become the very darkness they love. It may be said that two things advance in parallel lines towards the judgment-seat—the claim of God upon the moral being of man, and the moral being itself. The claim upon us is to become vessels of light, of truth, of life. If we meet that claim, our being heightens daily in capacity and worth. If we refuse to meet it, if we shut out God's light, our being becomes blind, and feeble, and stunted, a mere record of transgression and sin. *But it becomes this by the side of the undying claim.* And the two together—the divine claim, and the soul which has refused that claim—shall come face to face at the judgment-bar."*

With reference to the ripening of each soul for its own place and people, and the separation which, even in this life, is going on to be finally settled in the day of judgment, this same writer adds—

"It is not, and in this probation state it never can be, a perceptible process. The separation advances in the deeps, where only the eye of God can penetrate. On the surface of society men mingle as before. It is at the springs of their

* "Our Own Lives the Books of Judgment," by the Rev. Alexander MacLeod, D.D. (Macmillan). One of the most deeply interesting and striking books I have ever read.

being they divide. The tares and the wheat grow together till the harvest. Often when we seem to detect the separation, our inferences are wrong. Good men appear to side with evil-doers, as when they call in question the authority of some venerable superstition. Bad men appear to take part with the righteous, as when they clamour for liberty of conscience. And often, also, when the struggle is for particular principles, men who are really at one will seem to be opposed. But at every point, and under every aspect of the struggle, and beneath all the seeming unity or confusion of the surface, the conflict marches, with inevitable step, towards a complete and irreversible separation of the righteous and the wicked."

Again, speaking of the instrumentality by which the condemnation will be brought about and that there need be no *external* witnesses as accusers at the judgment-seat, he continues—

"Among the wonders which our being contains, this wonder of *memory*—the power of recording the present and bringing it back out of the past—stands pre-eminent. Like a distinct spirit within our own spirit, it sits with its spiritual scroll, beholding through our eyes, and drinking in through our ears, and touching by our hands, whatever we see, or hear, or feel, or say. It is the historian of our lives. You cannot meet a stranger upon the streets, nor utter a word in your remotest solitude, nor think a thought in your inmost heart, but this recording angel has noted it down upon the tablets of your soul *for ever*.

"Before it can be fully seen, however, that memory will be the great judgment-book, it must be known whether all its leaves can be at once and instantaneously unfolded; whether, in short, it is so constituted as to be able, on the judgment-day, to give up the entire mass of facts on which the judgment must proceed.

"Now, memory is so constituted. Its laws are known to

us, and this is known to be within the compass of their power. It may be added they are as fixed and certain as the heavenly bodies. The associative power of ideas is the fountain from which they flow. What the force of gravitation is to the disposition and movements of the heavenly bodies, this power of association is to the contents of memory. By this one subtle, far-shooting, many-tendrilled power, these contents are laid hold of, recalled, arranged, and displayed to view. The sight of the grave where you buried your neighbour recalls that neighbour to remembrance. The sound of an air which you have heard years ago will bring back the name or the form of the singer. The sight of a church, of a particular seat, of a particular text in your Bible, will recall a sermon, the impression it made, and the occasion on which it was delivered. The most startling operations of this power are to be found in the experiences of guilt. What sent Peter forth to weep so bitterly at the crowing of the cock? It was the remembrance of his Master's words which that crowing recalled. What blanches so visibly the criminal's cheek when an actual witness of his crime ascends the box? It is not alone the dread of conviction. It is also the effect on his own mind which the mere presence of a witness works—laying open to his consciousness again the circumstances and reality of a guilt which law is blindly trying to establish. And what mystic power is that within the steaming circle of debauch which chills so instantaneously the heart of that wretched toper, and makes his blood run cold? It is a single word flung forth in a passing song. But the word was one which his sainted mother had used in her dying counsels when she warned him away from the drunkard's path. And why is it when all the reapers are full of mirth among the bending grain that this particular one is forced back upon painful thought and hidden sorrow? It is because the very field they are reaping was the scene of an action which has darkened the whole path of life. Not one of the other reapers can see what is passing in their companion's mind. But there, as in a too faithful judgment-book, brought back to

remembrance by the field—the deed, the partners, the circumstances ; the temptation, so weak at first, so strong at last ; the help which might have come, but did not, because it was not sought ; the madness in which the sin was wrought ; the timorous after-pangs, quivering inwards into an agony of remorse when all was ended and irrecoverable—are painfully but scrupulously reproduced.

"Now undoubtedly there will be alterations—enlargement and elevation—of all the powers of our being on the day when the secrets of life are to be disclosed by the appearing of the Judge.

"‘It would require,’ Coleridge says, ‘only a different and apportioned organisation, the body celestial instead of the body terrestrial, to bring before every human soul the collective experience of its whole past existence.’ With a wider application, Archbishop Whately works out the same conjecture in his ‘Scripture Revelations of a Future State :’—‘It seems to me not improbable, that the change which shall take place in the body may be itself the appointed means for bringing about a change in the powers and tendencies of the mind. It is quite possible that our minds may at this moment actually possess faculties which have never been exercised ; and of which we have no notion whatever ; which have lain inactive, unperceived, and undeveloped for want of such a structure of bodily organs as is necessary to call them forth and give play to them (the powers of sight, for example, in a blind man). I think it is not unlikely that these (faculties) would be called into action by a mere change in our bodily organs, and a new system of organs. And if this should take place in a future state, we should at once be enabled to perceive, merely by means of a bodily change, whole classes of objects as new to our minds as colours are to a blind-born man, and as totally different from any we are now acquainted with as colours are with sounds. And by some change of this kind in the *brain*, an equally great revolution may, for aught we can tell, be produced in our *thinking* faculties also.’

“Let the change referred to in these two extracts be now

taken into account ; add to the suggestion already offered, respecting the associative power of the Judge's face upon the contents of memory, the indubitable fact, that either by resurrection or immediate change, all the powers of the human mind will be intensified and enlarged at the coming of the Judge ; assume the body celestial, and the disclosures of memory follow as a natural result. By the visible appearance of the Judge before the new and fuller organs of our changed nature, the hidden page on which our lives are written would thus be laid bare. And on that dread day memory will prove faithful to the laws of her working, and the untold story of our lives shall be declared. Thus, as I humbly conceive it, shall 'the books be opened !' At the first glance of the Judge's face ! The whole may be the work of a moment. A moment may serve to light up the hieroglyphic transparencies of the soul. Then, when the face of the Eternal shall bid memory forth, and she has to come up from her dwelling-place in the soul, like some weird angel of the wilderness, carrying in her loaded arms the proofs and documents on which the trials shall proceed, no tedious process shall be required to force the truth into light—no separate and outward book needs to be produced. Our own memory is the book, and the face of God shall open it.

" Consider this, all ye who are living in secret sin ! Consider this, ye who steal out in the darkness to do deeds of shame ! Consider this, ye who are cherishing ungodly thoughts and following ungodly aims ! You may not seem to others the guilty spirits which you are ; but not the less are you ripening for the righteous judgment to come. A recorder in your own souls is even now recording your doings truly. A judge in your own bosoms is even now judging your own actions justly. And the day is coming when that same judge shall appear in terrible majesty, and search that record of your lives, and bring every hidden thing to light. And if you had buried your wickedness in the very shadow of death, the brightness of His face would display it like the day."

But now let me return to the further consideration of the parable. Observe, that the tares are first “bound in bundles.” The being bound in “bundles” indicates their *fellowship in misery*; and being thus bound before the wheat is gathered would seem to imply that the righteous should behold God’s vengeance on the wicked: “With thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.” That the tares are gathered into bundles before the judgment also points to the bringing together of the wicked by their separation from the good. As the day of the Lord draws near we shall behold this in a marked manner. The principles which each professes to hold will be the centre round which they will gather. *Common ground* will draw to itself the ranks of each. The conspicuous feature will be separation more marked than it has ever yet been. “Then they that feared the Lord spake often *one to another*.” Then also shall the angel of judgment come forth and cry with a loud voice, “thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the *clusters* of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And he thrust in his sickle and gathered the vine of the earth and cast it into the great wine-press of the wrath of God” (Rev. xiv. 18, 19).

But we notice that the tares here may be divided into two classes. “The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do *iniquity*.” All are characterised as those who “do

iniquity ;” but some “offend” in that iniquity. The word in the original in its classic form means a trap or snare.* While the ungodly are on every side, there are those among them who live by laying traps for others, who grow rich on the ruin of others, whose whole life is a lying in wait to catch the unwary and to ruin souls. These are “scandals” and “seducers” and “spirits of devils,” “heaping to themselves wrath against the day of wrath and righteous judgment of God.”

“And shall cast them into a furnace of fire ; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Observe the significant word “cast.” How expressive of indignation, abhorrence, contempt ! They are *flung* away as something vile not only into the fire but into a “*furnace* of fire”—conveying to us the fierceness of the torment. Nor less expressive are the characteristic features of those who are thus eternally associated in misery. There is the “wailing” indicating the sorrow, the despair and unavailing regret. There is the “gnashing of teeth” which tells us of the *madness* of that despair. Yes, despair and rage, and this eternally ! Oh, fearful state ! And this not the condition of a few but of multitudes!—“wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to

* “Σκανδάλον (in its classical form, σκανδάληθρον) is that part of a trap or snare on which the bait is placed, and which, being touched, gives way, and causes the noose to draw suddenly tight. In the New Testament it is transferred to spiritual things, and includes whatever, entangling as it were men’s feet, might cause them to fall.”—Trench on the Parables.

destruction ; and many there be that go in thereat."

Reader, mark well these expressive figures. Either there is a hell or all language is a mockery. And remember whose words these are. They are the words of the Lord Jesus Himself—the meek and lowly Jesus whose words were all gentleness and love. What must it have been to Him to utter them ! And can He lie ? In the face of such language what must we say of those who speak of the annihilation of the wicked at death ? Do not these expressions flatly contradict all such notions ? Yes, there is an eternity of suffering for the wicked or words have no meaning ! There *is* an eternity of suffering, or else (fearful thought !) the Lord Jesus has deceived us and spoken falsely. Annihilation ! Believe it not. It is scientifically impossible ! What has been created *cannot* cease to exist. It may change its form but exist it does, and will do eternally. Let us ask those who hold this doctrine to think of what they are doing. Is not this doctrine one of the most comforting to every ungodly man ? Are there not thousands of them who will receive such a doctrine with delight ? Are there not tens of thousands who will tell you plainly that the dark shadow of a future judgment is the only thing that acts as a check to the most unbridled license, and that if they could only believe there was no hereafter they would give their lusts and passions full rein ? Can that be a true doctrine

which gives the full rein to the maddest passions of the corrupt heart? Is such a doctrine in harmony with the *laws of nature*—with the *moral government of God*? Is it not the instinctive utterance of nearly every natural heart “ Well if I shall never be called to account, why may I not enjoy myself to *the full?* ” Let men only feel that this doctrine is true, and every tie that holds society together—political, social, and moral—will be snapped asunder and our earth transformed to a Pandemonium. Reason and Scripture alike protest against such a doctrine as monstrous.

With regard to the eternity of future punishments, I would here supply the reader with an extract from one of the first Greek scholars in England as to the meaning of the expression “ for ever and ever.”

“ As designating duration, *εἰς τὸν αἰώνα* is the proper phrase for eternity. It does not appear to be employed in *a single passage* in the New Testament, where it can be proved to mean *limited* duration. The same may be said of the adjective *αἰώνιος*. It cannot be proved to be ever applied to *limited* duration. In the following passages the words *εἰς τὸν αἰώνα τῷν αἰώνων* (for ever and ever) occur in relation to future punishments, and they are *limited to eternity* — Rev. xiv. 11, xix. 3, xx. 10. Again, as to *εἰς τὸν αἰώνα* (for ever)—Mark iii. 29; John viii. 52, 58; John x. 28, xi. 26; 2 Peter ii. 17; Jude 13. There is not one of these passages will bear the construction ‘for a limited age.’ Again, as to *αἰώνιος* (everlasting), the following quotations show that the word does not refer to one particular *αἰών*, but to duration, *apart from all restriction as to limitation* :—Matt. xviii. 8, xix. 29, xxv. 41–46; Mark iii. 29; 2 Thess. i. 9; Heb. vi.

2; Jude 7. We certainly have the great preponderance of evidence in favour of the doctrine of eternal punishment, viewed thus in a philological aspect."*

The reader will observe I have only quoted those passages which bear on the eternity of *punishment*, and of these only a few. The words "for ever," and "everlasting," occur nearly a hundred times in the New Testament, the original of which will not bear the meaning of *limited* duration, and can only mean duration *without limit*. These quotations, though few, will suffice for the general reader as proving that the punishments of the wicked are eternal, and that the doctrine is clearly stated in God's blessed Word.

Let me now notice the closing verse of this parable. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." How striking the figure here used! "Then," when the tares are removed, "shall the righteous shine forth!" As if, up to that moment they had been under a cloud "with ungodly pretenders to their character, and claimants of their privileges, and obstructors of their course." Hitherto the light of God in them had to struggle with the darkness *in* them and *around* them. Now it comes forth in its brightness. Now the evil heart, the corrupt nature in them, is left behind for ever. Now every foe and every counterfeit is removed.

* "Course of Biblical and Theological Instruction," by Rev. Joseph Baylee, D.D., late Principal of St Aidan's College, Birkenhead. London : S. W. Partridge.

The clouds have all gone—why should not the light shine? “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” The glory of the saints shall now be twofold—a glory *in* them but hitherto hindered from shining out, and a glory *brought to* them by their coming Lord, such as was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration, when, as to the Lord Jesus *Himself*, the “fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistering, as no fuller on earth could white it;” and as to His people, represented by Moses and Elias, they “appeared in glory, and spake of His decease.” This shall be the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, when the clouds shall all be rolled away, and when they shall shine as the sun (Dan. xii. 3).

What a contrast to all the darkness, and littleness, and weakness of this present scene! The deep recesses of the soul echo “Vanity!” on everything here. We feel that littleness is stamped on everything, and the renewed and immortal spirit shrinks at every touch of the world’s tempting offers with a deep feeling of dissatisfaction and unrest.

“The very greatness of our powers makes this life look pitiful, the very pitifulness of this life forces on our thoughts to another, and the prospect of another gives a dignity and value to this life which promises it; and thus this life is at once great and little, and we rightly contemn it while we exalt its importance.

“Men there are who, in a single moment of their lives, have shown a superhuman height and majesty of mind which it

would take ages for them to employ on its proper objects, and, as it were, to exhaust ; and who, by such passing flashes, like rays of the sun, and the darting of lightning, give token of their immortality, give token to us that they are but angels in disguise, the elect of God sealed for eternal life, and destined to judge the world, and to reign with Christ for ever. Yet they are suddenly taken away, and we have hardly recognised them when we lose them. Can we believe that they are not removed for higher things elsewhere ? ”

So is it with everything here. All things tell us that a brighter and better world is dawning, and a sphere more consonant with the longings of the immortal and redeemed spirit.

“ Then why should we rest in this world, when it is the token and promise of another ? Why should we be content with its surface, instead of appropriating what is stored beneath it ? To those who live by faith, everything they see speaks of that future world ; the very glories of nature, the sun, moon, and stars, and the richness and the beauty of the earth are as types and figures witnessing and teaching the invisible things of God. All that we see is destined one day to burst forth into a heavenly bloom, and to be transfigured into immortal glory. Heaven at present is out of sight, but in due time, as snow melts and discovers what it lay upon, so will this visible creation fade away before those greater splendours which are behind it, and on which at present it depends. In that day shadows will retire, and the substance show itself. The sun will grow pale and be lost in the sky, but it will be before the radiance of Him whom it does but image, the Sun of Righteousness, with healing on His wings, who will come forth in visible form, as a bridegroom out of his chamber, while His perishable type decays. The stars which surround it will be replaced by saints and angels circling His throne. Above and below, the clouds of the air, the trees of the field, the waters of the great deep will be

found impregnated with the forms of everlasting spirits—the servants of God which do His pleasure. And our own mortal bodies will then be found in like manner to contain within them an inner man, which will then receive its due proportions, as the soul's harmonious organ, instead of that gross mass of flesh and blood which sight and touch are sensible of. For this glorious manifestation the whole creation is at present in travail, earnestly desiring that it may be accomplished in its season.”*

Reader, that day is at hand. Are you one of the Lord's “good seed,” or are you a “tare?” Which? Remember, indecision will never do then. One or the other it must be, it is *now*—either wheat for the barn or tares for “the furnace of fire.” Reader, where are *you*?

“Through the night of doubt and sorrow,
Onward goes the pilgrim band,
Singing songs of expectation,
Marching to the promised land ;
And before us through the darkness
Gleameth clear the guiding Light ;
Brother clasps the hand of brother,
And steps fearless through the night.

“One the light of God's dear presence,
Never in its work to fail,
Which illumes the wild, rough places,
Of this gloomy haunted vale ;
One the object of our journey,
One the faith which never tires,
One the earnest looking forward,
One the hope our God inspires.

“One the strain which mouths of thousands
Lift as from the heart of one ;

* Rev. J. H. Newman, D.D.

One the conflict, one the peril,
One the march in God begun ;
One the gladness of rejoicing
On the Resurrection shore,
With one Father o'er us shining
In His love for evermore.

“ Go we onward, pilgrim brothers ;
Visit first the cross and grave,
Where the cross its shadow flingeth,
Where the boughs of cypress wave :
Then—a shaking as of earthquakes,
Then—a rending of the tomb,
Then—a scattering of all shadows,
And an end of toil and gloom.”

CHAPTER X.

THE MUSTARD-SEED.

MATT. xiii. 31, 32.

"Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

CHAPTER X.

THE MUSTARD-SEED.

BEFORE entering on this parable, the reader must bear in mind what has been said as to the whole of these parables—that they are to be viewed in pairs.

The parable of the sower is the introduction or preface.

First pair: the tares and wheat and the good and bad fish, shewing the mixed character of the kingdom, and the final separation.

Second pair: the mustard-seed and the leaven, showing the *external* growth and the *internal* power of the Gospel.

Third pair: the hidden treasure and the pearl, showing the kingdom found *without seeking*, and the kingdom *sought* and found.

Thus viewed the connection is simple and clear, and a beautiful harmony is presented which relieves the mind from difficulty in understanding these parables, and prevents us falling into extravagant interpretations. We have now to consider the ex-

ternal growth of the kingdom of God, from the smallest and most insignificant beginnings to that of a great tree in the branches of which the fowls of the air take up their abode. That which pairs itself with this parable, namely, the leaven, will be considered in the following chapter.

If it be asked, what is the connection between this parable and that of the leaven ? we reply, that both parables present this one feature—the growth of the kingdom of God from very small beginnings, its progress and marvellous increase until, to use another image, “the stone cut out without hands becomes a great mountain, and fills the whole earth.” The leaven shows the kingdom of God as it cometh—“*not with observation.*” The mustard-seed shows the kingdom as it displays itself *openly*.

“The leaven shows the *intensive* power of the Gospel ; the mustard-seed the *extensive*. The leaven shows the power of the truth on the world *brought into contact* with it ; the mustard-seed the power of the truth to develop itself *from within*, as the tree, shut up within the seed, unfolds itself according to the laws of its own being.

“Chrysostom traces, finally, the connection between this parable and those which have gone before. From that of the sower, the disciples may have gathered that of the seed which they should sow, three parts would perish, and only a fourth part would prosper ; while that of the tares had opened to them the prospect of further hindrances, which would beset even *that* portion. Now, then, lest they should altogether lose heart and despair, these two parables are spoken for their encouragement. ‘My kingdom,’ the Lord would say, ‘shall survive these losses, and surmount these hindrances,

until, small and discouraging as its first beginnings may appear, it shall, like a mighty tree, fill all the earth with its branches—like potent leaven, diffuse its influence through the whole earth.’”*

The plant named in the parable is not the one known by that name among us. It is supposed to be another species, yielding a similar kind of fruit.

“The growth of a mighty kingdom is not here for the first time likened to that of a tree. Many of our Lord’s hearers must have been familiar with such a comparison from the Old Testament. Dan. iv. 10-12; Ezek. xxxi. 3-9, xvii. 22-24; Psalm lxxx. 8.

“But why, it may be asked, among all trees is a mustard-tree chosen here? Many nobler plants, as the vine, or taller trees, as the cedar (1 Kings iv. 33; Ezek. iii. 3), might have been named. Doubtless this is chosen, not with reference to greatness, which it obtains in the end, for in this respect many other trees surpass it, but to *the proportion between the smallness of the seed, and the greatness of the tree which is unfolded from that seed*. For this is the point to which the Lord calls special attention—not to the greatness of the mustard-tree, but to its greatness as compared with the seed from which it springs. ‘What He would fain teach His disciples was, not that His kingdom should be glorious, but that it should be glorious in spite of its weak and slight and despised beginnings.’

“The mustard-seed, minute as it was and trivial, ranked among the nobler Pythagorean symbols. It was esteemed to possess medicinal virtues against the bites of venomous creatures and poisons, and was used as a remedy in many diseases. . . . Besides its heat, its fiery vigour, and that only through being bruised, it gives out its best virtues; and all this under so insignificant an appearance, and in so small a

* Trench on the Parables.

compass, may well have moved the Saviour to select it to set forth the character of His kingdom, and that doctrine of a crucified Redeemer which, though to the Greeks foolishness, and to the Jews a stumbling-block, should prove to them that believe ‘the power of God unto salvation.’”*

As an instance of the use made of the mustard-seed, in its figurative capacity, to convey expressive meanings, we are told in Eastern tradition “that when Darius sent Alexander the Great a barrel of sesame, in order to acquaint him with the *number* of his soldiers, Alexander sent a bag of mustard-seed in return to Darius, to indicate the *active, fiery, biting courage* of his.”†

Our Lord’s statement, “which is the least of all seeds,” has presented a difficulty to the minds of some, since the mustard-seed was not by any means the “least of all seeds.” Many other seeds, such as the poppy and rue, are smaller. This however need present no difficulty. “Small as a grain of mustard-seed” was a proverbial expression for anything exceedingly minute. If a man wished to convey an idea of anything despised or inexplicably little, he did so by saying “it was like a grain of mustard-seed.” How apt and beautiful is such a figure to represent the Gospel, as well as the Christ which it sets forth !

The remark we have made with regard to the mustard-*seed* not being the smallest seed abso-

* Trench on the Parables.

† D’Herbelot, Biblioth. Oriental., *sub voce Escander*, in Trench on the Parables.

lutely speaking but only so in its *popular* accep-tation, is true of the mustard-tree when it has attained perfection. Our Lord adds, "When it is grown it is the greatest among herbs." It is not the greatest of trees absolutely. Our Lord did not speak of it in its *absolute* sense. He spoke of the greatness of the *tree* in contrast with the *smallness of the seed*, and in this sense it was literally true. There is no tree so large as this growing from so small a seed. No other seed from which so great a tree grows could have been chosen by our Lord to express the truth that the Gospel is a small and despised seed, and yet from it has sprung so great a tree. The marvellous greatness from so despised a beginning, could be set forth by no other figure, so adequately or so graphically, as by this of the mustard-seed and the mustard-tree. How true its spiritual application! See that grain of mustard-seed—the crucified Nazarene and His twelve illiterate Galilean fishermen—the derision and reproach of all men! Yet what a tree has sprung from it! How have millions sat down under its shadow with delight! It has overturned kingdoms and bent the iron bars and gates of ten thousand prisons. It has sent forth its influence to the ends of the earth. It has bowed the mightiest conquerors of the human race in its course, and like a mighty river, swept everything before it. The stone cut out without hands is swelling in gigantic proportions, and shall soon fill the whole earth.

Look again at Luther! See the grain of mustard-

seed! A solitary monk, barefooted, and singing songs in the streets of Germany to earn a penny! What a great and mighty tree has sprung from that seed! Popes and emperors and kings trembled in the presence of that despised man, and his words have overturned the mightiest strongholds of superstition and error the world has ever seen!

Look again at the Bible!

"What a grain of mustard-seed! What more feeble in some respects than the Bible? Apparently what divinity is there in the Book of Ruth? what religion in Canticles? what truth in Ecclesiastes? Are not the Psalms filled with the bitterest impassioned hate? Is not Jewish history defiled with slaughter and cruelty? What harmony is there between the gentle spirit of Christ and the warrior prowess of David? Can we think that the ungrammatical language of an apostle, and the low mean style of a Hebrew herdman, or the unintelligible visions of an old man, are indeed the infallible revelation of an all-wise God? Do we not see everywhere the marks of feebleness? What could Moses have known about geology, or Joshua of astronomy? Are we really to believe in demoniac possession, or think that a witch could bring up a departed spirit? What evidence have we of the age and authorship of the various books? Can we suppose that a divine revelation would be thus exposed to all sorts of ill-treatment, and to the defectiveness of transmission? Are we really bound to believe in the divine authority for the slaughter of the Canaanites, for the polygamy of David, or even for the doctrine of *eternal* damnation for *temporal* sin? These, and a thousand similar cavils and questions, have been the triumph of the unbeliever, and too often the perplexity of the believer, in all ages.

"And yet the Bible holds its ground. A Syro-Grecian sovereign may do all in his power to destroy every copy of

it, and to force its adherents to apostasy. A still more powerful monarch of imperial Rome may exert all the might of his empire for its destruction. Age after age men may combine against it: still the Bible remains imperishable and unmutilated. It is read by all men. The politician finds its language so strong and so terse that when he wishes to excite the emotions, to convince the judgment, or to convey a lesson of wisdom ; he does homage to the power of the Bible by adopting its phraseology. The Bible has taught the philosopher a divine theosophy. It has enlarged the bounds of his horizon, and corrected the erroneousness of his judgment. It has unfolded before him prospects on all sides, of which human philosophy had never dreamt.

“The Bible has created a literature of its own, while it has pervaded the literature, the philosophy, the science, the politics, and the legislation and manners of more millions of men, and of higher forms of civilisation and thought, than Greece with its brilliant intellectuality, or Rome with its wide-spread dominion, ever reached. The Bible has comforted the bed of sickness, brightened the home, and refined the intercourse of the peasant in his cottage, and of the prince in his palace. For more than three thousand three hundred years it has been going onward in its course, itself gradually enlarging during the fifteen hundred years of its composition, and now for eighteen centuries the prized and priceless treasure of the Christian Church. New triumphs await it. Translated into every human language, it is speeding its way to every human home.

“Such a Book is its own evidence. Its results in the world prove it to be divine. Why has it penetrated into the depths of every heart but because its intelligent piety has elevated human sentiment into divine truth. Its language explains to all willing minds the mystery of their own hearts, and therefore it arrests and charms every listening ear. It solves, for the speculative mind, many a difficulty, and it creates none, except to those who misunderstand it. If the

Bible were to be blotted out from existence, the world of thought and feeling would become chaotic darkness. Entirely to uproot the Bible we must alter the whole phraseology of human thought, for what literature is not pervaded by its words? We must bring back chronology to its hopeless obscurity, depriving time itself of any world-wide era. We must send back the originals of historic records to the long exploded myths, and leave the human conscience with no better standard than that of Homeric theogony. The legislation of Europe would have to go back to its barbarous periods, and the framework of society would have to be taken to pieces in order to uproot from it the influence of the Bible.

"Who but God could have given a Book thus fitted for all time, and adapted to every subject of human thought? Only the pure in heart can see its purity. He who pierces most deeply into its mysteries can best understand how far there are depths of mystery still more profound. He whose eye is most accustomed to survey its ever-widening horizon, is only the more fully convinced that it will widen onwards until the vision is lost in its extent. Feeble indeed is the capacity of the human intellect when dealing with the vastness of its materials for thought. Things new are ever developing from things old, for ever germinating, and yet for ever ripe."*

What a tree from such a seed! Even the enemies of truth have been compelled to acknowledge the power of God's Word. Let us listen to the language of a deist.

"View it in what light we may, the Bible is a very surprising phenomenon. . . . This collection of books has taken such a hold on the world as no other. The litera-

* Rev. Dr Baylee, late Principal of St Aidan's College, Birkenhead, in "Course of Biblical and Theological Instruction." London: S. W. Partridge.

ture of Greece, which goes up like incense from that land of temples and heroic deeds, has not half the influence of this Book from a nation alike despised in ancient and modern times. It is read of a Sabbath in all the ten thousand pulpits of our land. In all the temples of Christendom is its voice lifted up week by week. The sun never sets on its gleaming page. It goes equally to the cottage of the plain man and the palace of the king. It is woven into the literature of the scholar, and colours the talk of the street. The bark of the merchant cannot sail the sea without it ; no ship of war goes to the conflict but the Bible is there. It enters men's closets, mingles in all the grief and cheerfulness of life. The affianced maiden prays God in Scripture for strength in her new duties ; men are married by Scripture. The Bible attends them in their sickness, when the fever of the world is on them. The aching head finds a softer pillow when the Bible lies underneath. The mariner, escaping from shipwreck, clutches this first of his treasures, and keeps it sacred to God. It goes with the pedlar in his crowded pack ; cheers him at even-tide, when he sits down dusty and fatigued ; brightens the freshness of his morning face. It blesses us when we are born ; gives names to half Christendom ; rejoices with us ; has sympathy for our mourning ; tempers our grief to finer issues. It is the better part of our sermons. It lifts man above himself. Our best of uttered prayers are in its storied speech, where-with our fathers and our patriarchs prayed. The timid man, about awaking from this dream of life, looks through the glass of Scripture, and his eyes grow bright ; he does not fear to stand alone, to tread the way unknown and distant, to take the death-angel by the hand, and bid farewell to wife, and babes, and home. Men rest on this their dearest hopes. It tells them of God and of His blessed Son—of earthly duties and of heavenly rest. Foolish men find it the source of Plato's wisdom, and the science of Newton, and the art of Raphael. Men who believe nothing else that is spiritual, believe the Bible all through ; without this

they would not confess, say they, even that there was a God." *

There is still another aspect in which the mustard-tree is a beautiful figure of the kingdom of God. The branches of this tree are very wide-spreading, and besides this, its seed is much sought after by birds because so abundant and nutritive. On this account "the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." Often have travellers seen immense flocks of birds gathered upon the boughs, which were strong enough to sustain the weight without being broken. Thus the tree, in a very striking manner, affords both food and shelter.

And so with the great Gospel tree. It has been the food for millions of souls now in glory. It has been the shelter of the wanderer and the outcast in all ages. It stretches out its branches to the utmost ends of the earth and proclaims in the ears of all, "Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Yes, and those branches shall still spread and spread till He shall come whose the kingdom is. Then shall He gather underneath His shelter all the far-off sons of toil and want, of ignorance and woe. They shall come and nestle in the branches of the tree of life. "Living waters shall go out from Jerusalem," and shall overflow the world. "Righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the

* Rev. Theodore Parker.

sea;" and "all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest." "There shall be one Lord, and His name one." "The leaves of the tree shall be for the healing of the nations." Christ is the mustard-tree in whose branches all men shall find food and shelter.

Reader, have you been led by the Holy Spirit to Him? Is your food Christ? Is your only shelter Christ? Have you eaten this living Manna in the desert? Like the bird of the desert, panting from hunger and pursued by the fowler, have you seen from far-off this living Tree, and taken refuge beneath its outstretched boughs? Oh it is Jesus only that can *give* life, or *keep* life in your poor dying soul. Keep within the branches of this tree. There no shaft can reach you, there no want can come. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters."

Christian reader, learn from this parable that power does not consist in *magnitude* but in inward *energy*. All that is visible in our outward life is simply the development of that which is hidden within us. All the outward ramifications and varieties of human character are the development of a hidden seed in the soul. The same principles of truth are as much seen and acted upon in the smallest and most trifling action as they are in the government of kingdoms and the regulation of worlds. Both in the one and the other God

acts on the same principles. If you are a true follower of Christ it is because the seed of God is in you. If you are the servant of Satan you have the seed of Satan within you. Heaven, with its myriads, is only the branches of a tree whose seed has been of God. Hell, with its countless never-dying numbers, is only the branches of a tree "whose seed is in itself"—the seed of the destroyer.

Reader, what are *your* branches? As the branches so is the seed; as is the seed so are the branches. You belong, *at this moment*, either to *Satan or to Christ*. *Which is it?*

I have said so much of the Word of God, but reader remember, the great power is not the Word but Christ *in* the Word. You may know the Word clearly, intelligently. You may understand all its doctrines, bow to all its requirements, and yet your eyes may be shut—you may never have seen Christ. Oh for the Spirit's power to draw aside the veil that covers your spiritual vision, and give you one glimpse—just *one*—of Jesus! What a change will come over you! Reader, have you *felt* this?

It is related of one of our celebrated painters, who was an infidel, that he had to draw a picture of Christ. In order to do so, and that it should be a masterpiece of art, he had to study closely the character of the Lord Jesus as revealed in the Gospels. To depict the lines of *that* countenance on the canvas he had to try and grasp the character and spirit of the Saviour from the *language*

in which it was photographed, but which he had all his life professed to despise. One day, while trying from this language to penetrate that character who is “the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person,” God photographed the Saviour’s image on *his own* heart! The pencil dropped from his hands, and falling on his knees, with tearful eye and clasped hands he exclaimed, “My Lord and my God !”

Reader, have *you* thus *looked into and seen* Christ?

“ If I have only Him,
 If He alone is mine,
 If e’en beyond the grave His faith
 My heart shall not resign ;
 Of sorrow nought I prove,
 Nought feel but glad devotion, joy, and love.

“ If only He be mine,
 All else I gladly leave ;
 On pilgrim-staff still follow true,
 And to my Master cleave ;
 Let others fondly stray
 Along the broad, frequented flowery way.

“ If I have none but Him,
 Joyful to sleep I go :
 Ever a sweet restoring stream
 His blood for me doth flow,
 Whose mild compelling might
 All things must soften, and in peace unite.

“ If I have none but Him,
 The universe is mine ;
 Blest as a child of heaven that views
 The Majesty divine :
 Enrapt in sacred thought,
 No more by earthly cares am I distraught.

"Where only He is mine,
My fatherland I see,
And every boon is on me poured,
As birthright full and free.
Long sought-for brothers then
In His disciples I behold again."

—HEL LOWE.

CHAPTER XI.

T H E L E A V E N.

MATT. xiii. 33.

“Another parable spake He unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE LEAVEN.

WE must again remind the reader of the numbers connected with these parables. The entire number of the parables in this chapter is seven. I pass over the parable recorded by St Mark of the seed growing secretly, because that is not a *new* parable but only an *expansion* of those recorded in this chapter—shewing the *manner* in which the seed grows. Seven is the divine number, indicating perfection according to the divine mind. The Lord selected seven parables to shew forth the *various aspects* of the kingdom of heaven in which it should present itself to the end of this dispensation. He seems to say to us, “In furnishing you with *seven* I am presenting you with a *body* of truth according to my own mind, perfect and complete, both in its outline and in its details, and comprehending every aspect of my kingdom to the end of time.”

But the reader will have observed that these parables are divided into two sets—four of them being spoken *on the shore* and to the *multitude*, and three of them *in the house* and only to the *disciples*. These two sets are quite distinct, and in our ex-

amination of the subject must be *kept* distinct. As seven is the divine number denoting a perfect body of truth according to the divine mind, so four is the *world* number, indicating the relation of the kingdom to the world outside. In beautiful accordance with this, the first four were spoken by our Lord *outside the house* and to the *mixed multitude*—thus shewing us very clearly for whom they were intended. But as seven is the divine number, and four the world number, so also three is the divine number, bringing before us the kingdom in its close and intimate relation with the person, work, and offices, of the Father Son and Holy Ghost. With these relations, only the people of God have to do. The world may see the kingdom in its outward aspect as a great tree, or as fruit in a field, but they can know nothing of it as a treasure, or a pearl of great price. These are *hidden* aspects, and only to be known by the teaching of the Spirit of God. In beautiful accordance with this we find that the last three parables—the hidden treasure, the hidden pearl, and the drag-net hidden in the great sea—were spoken by our Lord *in the house*, and only to the *disciples*—shewing plainly the aspect of the kingdom they are intended to present. The kingdom of heaven in its *outward* aspect, relating to the world, indicated by the first four parables; and the kingdom of heaven in its hidden aspect, relating to the people of God, indicated by the last three parables—these make up the body of divine truth in the entire seven.

In this parable of the leaven, we have reached the last of the four spoken by our Lord outside the house.

I feel convinced that the view which regards leaven in this parable as evil is utterly untenable. Let me first examine the grounds on which it rests, as well as the consequences which follow from holding this view. It is said that leaven in every other part of Scripture expresses that which is evil; and that therefore we have no right to adopt a different view in this passage without a sufficient warrant for doing so. But let me remind the advocates of this view, that the kingdom of heaven in this passage is not likened unto leaven, but to leaven *in meal*; and that it thus differs from every passage in which leaven is brought before us. In every other it is leaven looked at *in itself*; here it is leaven *hid in meal*. Overlooking this has led to the error into which every advocate of this view has fallen. It is perfectly marvellous how this can have been overlooked! They have separated the leaven from the meal pretty much in the same way as so many excellent people separate a verse of Scripture from its context, and rear a fabric upon it which vanishes into air at the first touch.

But conceding the point, for a moment, that it is leaven in its *abstract* sense, and that leaven is in every other passage regarded as evil (which is very doubtful) is *that* a reason why it should be so regarded here? Is Scripture language so stereotyped as never be variable in its meaning? Take two or three

instances. The *devil* is called a “roaring *lion*;” but *Christ* is also called by the same figure—“the *Lion* of the tribe of Judah.” God’s people in a state of backsliding are compared to the “silly dove;” but God the Holy Ghost is compared also to a dove. Satan is called the serpent; but Christ, in His most glorious character, is set forth under the same figure—“as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” The lion may be the devil or it may be the Saviour—according to the aspect in which we look at it. If we speak of the kingly dignity or majesty of the lion, it is Christ: if we speak of its fierceness, it is Satan. So of leaven. If we speak of its souring and corrupting properties, it is evil: if we speak of its warmth or nutritive and penetrating properties, it is good.

I might multiply passages to shew the error of arbitrary use of terms in Scripture, but these are sufficient to warn us that we must look at the *sense* in which a word is used to determine its meaning.

But if we press those who hold this view, closely, what are the results? “The leaven,” they say “is false doctrine, which shall ultimately penetrate the Church so that the whole shall be leavened.”

Mark now, the consequences of this view in connection with the language in which the parable of the leaven is set before us. Mark its words—“*till the whole was leavened.*” So the figure

teaches that there is *not one* grain of the meal which is not *thoroughly* penetrated, the *character changed*. Well then, a time is at hand when there will not be *one* grain of profession in the Church that will not be *wholly* corrupted. The Church of Christ comprises God's people, as well as professors. A time is coming when there will not be one Christian whose doctrine and profession and practice is not wholly corrupt—"till the *whole* was leavened." If this be true then, indeed, notwithstanding our Lord's words to the contrary, "the gates of hell" *will* have "prevailed against the Church." Then indeed, will Satan be, not the strong man armed, but "the stronger than *He*." Then it will not be true that the Lord before He comes will have a people of whom it is said "they *feared* the Lord, and spake often one to another," and called by the Lord Himself His "*special treasure*." The view that His people's doctrine will be eaten through and through with corruption and falsehood is utterly incompatible with such a statement. Then will it not be true that "*we which are alive and remain*, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air?"—for there will be none but those whose doctrine, profession, and practice is eaten *through and through* with corruption and falsehood.

If, however, it is meant that the *professing* Church will be so leavened, is not the *real* Church part of it? And is it not said absolutely, "till

the *whole* was leavened?" Besides, are *mere professors* ever compared to *meal*? Are they not "tares," "chaff," "stubble?" Are not the Lord's people the "*meal*?"

On every side this view is *beset* with difficulties, and if pressed, leads to the most disastrous and unscriptural conclusions. As one who has held it for more than twenty years I renounce it altogether, because I cannot maintain it in the face of Scripture and the conclusions to which I am driven by adhering to it. It is arbitrary, short-sighted, contrary to Scripture, and can only be maintained to support a theory which, after all, it is not needed to support, namely, that the world is to wax worse and worse, and that its conversion will only be brought about by the personal appearing of the Son of God before the Millennium. I hold this view strongly, and cannot understand how every reader of God's Word cannot see it written, as I believe it is, on nearly every page of God's Word as with a sunbeam. The view of leaven being good, and the statement in the parable "till the *whole* was leavened," taken in its most absolute sense, in no way interferes with this most precious doctrine. This I trust to shew.

Besides all this, such a view disturbs the harmony of the parables. They are a chain, comprising seven links, each unfolding an aspect of the kingdom—its seed, its fruit, its external growth, its intensive power, its hidden treasure, its inestimable value, and its final blessedness. To consider it as

a kingdom eaten through and through with corruption and falsehood would make it not the “kingdom of *heaven*,” but the kingdom of *hell*.

Then first, what is leaven in meal? The three measures simply indicate the usual quantity used. The leaven is that which makes it into food. The Gospel of Christ is the food of the soul. The leaven is Christ. He, and only He, is food. “I am the Bread of life.” “He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.” “He that cometh to Me shall never hunger.” Into whatever we put this leaven it becomes food. Is it into a human soul?—that man becomes food for others, he manifests Christ. Is it put into a sermon, a book, a tract?—it becomes life for others. Is it put into a nation?—that nation begins to shew life. Wherever the Gospel enters there it becomes the life. Just as the mustard-tree shews the *extensive* character of the kingdom, and its shelter and food, so does the leaven shew us the *intensive* character of that kingdom, and its power to sustain life. Leaven in meal is literally the food, the life of all men. The same truth is conveyed *spiritually* in each of these parables. Is it that of the sower and his seed? All seed is to support life. Is it the wheat among tares? All wheat is to give life. Is it the mustard-tree in its growth? Still the same truth is conveyed—to afford shelter and food. Is it leaven in meal? It is still to support life. And why this same truth running through each? Because we are in the midst of a desert. It is a

dying world. Man is a dying creature. We want life—only life. Life is Jesus, and Jesus is the centre of this “kingdom of heaven.” Every aspect of it reflects *Him*.

And still there is connected with this another beautiful truth. Leaven is not put into *anything* or *everything*—into sand or into dust. There is no adaptation, no correspondence. It is put into that for which it is adapted. Only thus does it become *food*. Only God has adapted, or can adapt, things to each other. So is it with leaven in meal. The Holy Spirit makes this correspondence between Christ and the soul into which he enters. He brings Christ into the soul, thus the man becomes food. Is it a human soul, a sermon, a letter, a word, a book, or a tract? The Spirit puts Christ into it, and it becomes food. Thus a dying world is fed. Thus the soul’s life is sustained by eating of this bread.

But who is the woman? Undoubtedly the Church of Christ. Read the 15th chapter of St Luke for a proof of this. We have, in the first parable of that chapter, the Shepherd going *out into the wilderness* to seek the lost. In other words, we have the work of God *the Son*. In the woman with the light in her hand we have the Church, with the light of the Holy Ghost shining in her, seeking the lost. In other words, we have the work of *God the Holy Ghost*. In the Father going out to meet the prodigal we have the work of *God the Father*. Thus these three parables present us with the work

of the Father Son and Holy Ghost, all engaged in seeking and saving the lost.

So is it in the leaven in meal. We have the woman, the Church of Christ, putting into everything what she well knows will do its work on the meal—*Christ*. The woman is sure—she never stops to ask the question—that there is a power in that leaven to penetrate every grain of the meal, and mould it into its likeness. She knows that nothing else will do it. So does the Church of Christ. She knows the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation.” She knows it must be Jesus, and Jesus only. Nothing else will do. Education will not. Sanitary laws will not. It must be Christ, and only Christ, put into a heart prepared by the Holy Ghost. The leaven—*Christ*; the prepared heart—the meal.

But this leaven is not only *hidden* in the meal, it mingles with it, becomes a part of its very nature. The leaven and meal become so blended as to become inseparable even in thought. It becomes *identical* with the meal. So is it with Christ and His people. They are so closely one. He is “bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh.” He has so taken their nature and their place as to be identical in all things, sin only excepted. They are gradually moulded by the Spirit of God into His likeness, as the leaven assimilates the meal to itself. Thus the leaven goes on working till that time when “*the whole* shall be leavened,” “when they shall be like Him for they shall see Him as He is.” Then shall the Church become food to the world,

giving life to everything dead. Then shall “the mountain of the Lord’s house be established on the top of the mountains, and all nations shall flow unto it.” Thus shall it be the life of the world.

But if the world should be the meal and Christ the leaven in it, does not this imply that instead of it “waxing worse and worse” it will be ultimately leavened by the Gospel? The world *will wax* worse and worse till the Lord comes. But the coming of the Lord is *part of the leaven which is to leaven it*. It will never be converted till He comes; but that coming is the leaven that will do it. Christ in the Gospel is now leavening the hearts of His people. Christ coming before the Millennium is the leaven that will finish it—when “all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest.”

There are other points and coincidences connected with this leaven and meal which I cannot, and I feel I ought not, to pass over.

The woman “*took*” the leaven. It was not the unfolding of something that already existed, but a new power brought into the world from above. It was not a philosophy but a revelation—a new and quickening power brought into an old and dying world. It is hidden, and makes itself felt outwardly from within.

So is it when Christ enters the soul. It is a heavenly seed implanted there. It is not reformation. It is not religion acting upon the moral nature of man. It is a *new creation*. It is something the man never had before. It is something

none can give him but the Holy Ghost. It produces a *revolution* within him. It opens his eyes. It unstops his ears. It brings him into a new world. He is born over again. All the past seems as if it had been lost time. No wonder if he is looked upon as mad. He has undergone a revolution. "Old things are passed away: behold all things are become new." So great is sometimes the change as to leave its impression externally, and within a short space of time. One who had lived an ungodly and reckless life, full of licentiousness sensuality and sin, was thus arrested in his wild career. His photograph had been taken in that state. It was a faithful picture of the sensualist—the besotted countenance, the leer in the eye, the sinister look, the reckless demeanour—all too plainly revealed who had ruled within. Twelve months afterwards, during which time he had been brought to know the Saviour, his photograph was again taken. What a contrast was presented in the two as they hung side by side! There was the majesty of a deep sorrow that had shaken the frame to its foundation as it lay in the background, and on it were visibly traced the marks of a still deeper peace. The eye shone with a calmness, and the whole demeanour spoke of one who had undergone a mighty revolution, which had translated the soul from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. There were stamped on that countenance, as with a sunbeam, the lineaments of the common Christian brother-

hood, which, to all who had seen him and known him before, arrested the attention and suggested the thought, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon his Beloved?" What a mighty change! Could all the forces of nature and morality combined have produced it? Nay, they are but as the spider's web in the storm. It was the almighty power of God the Holy Ghost which produced this transformation in this far-off prodigal. That Word which brooded over the dark chaos and void of nature and said, "Let there be light; and there was light," had spoken again over this dark chaos, and a new creation sprang into existence at His Omnipotent Word. The shrine of Satan had become the temple of the Holy Ghost, and that man had become a living soul!

Another feature with regard to the leaven is the small quantity in so large a mass as three measures. Yet is there such power in this as to change the entire mass, and conform it to its own nature. Just as it *penetrates* too, does it become food, and only so far.

So is it spiritually. Christ in the soul may be a small despised thing at first, but under the fostering power of the Spirit of God it overcomes every obstacle, and moulds the soul into its own likeness. And so far as the soul is thus *penetrated* by the truth, will that soul be food to others. So far as such a man is living himself will he make those around him live. Every body gives out just the force it carries within it, and no more. Is your

own soul alive? it will communicate that life. The *communication* will be the measure of its *possession*; so far and no further. It may have various *modes* of expression, but it will give out only that which it possesses within itself. Reader, measure the *inward* man by the *outward* expression. Whatever may be said to the contrary this is a fixed law in the kingdom of heaven.

Again, as the leaven will not allow the dough to retain its former nature, so Christ in the soul will not allow the old nature to rule. It must and will overcome it. Your life cannot retain its old character. There must be, there will be, a great change. A new principle will run through life. A new motive will animate everything. Everything in the minutiae of daily life will come under the sanctifying influence of God's Holy Spirit. Even the veriest trifles will have *unconsciously* a new influence infused. There will be the breathing of a spirit in them which they never possessed before. And just as leaven mingles with every grain of dough, so will this spirit blend with every action of life. It will energise every thought every word every look every feeling every aim every duty. It may be you will not be conscious of it, but the influence will be all the more powerful from this very unconsciousness on your part. It will be the new nature in you spreading itself out into everything, just as the leaven from its very nature mingles with and penetrates every grain of dough.

Reader, has Christ this place in your heart?

Has He a place in all that is seen in you and about you from day to day? Does He mingle with and penetrate everything connected with you? Has He such a place that the old nature is kept down and overcome? Is Christ in everything—in every *grain* of your life small and great? Oh what place has Jesus in everything? If there is anything in you or about you in which Jesus *is not*, so far you are *dead*, with all your religion! Life is where Jesus is, and all without Him is death.

But reader if you be a child of God, beware on that account, as being the new leaven of Christ Jesus, how you mingle with the world around you. You are the leaven, but go not into that world needlessly. Go where you can glorify God. But where you cannot do this, venture not at the peril of your soul. You have no business anywhere, or to be engaged in anything, if you would not like the Lord to send for you there. Would you like the Lord to send for you in the ball-room, or at the concert, or in any other such scene? If not, what business have you there? Measure all things by this test. Make no excuses. If there is any scene in which you would rather not be when God summons you, *it is wrong*. Your own conscience tells you so. Beware how you tempt God by unworthy apologies and excuses. It is wrong, and *you know it*.

And remember, lastly, that the evil from contact with the world will be greater than the good you

do to the world. The professed love you have to men's souls, and which is the excuse for mingling with it, is in reality love to the *things* and not to the *souls*. Read the history of God's dealings with Israel. He never says, "you may go among them for you may thus do them good;" but He does say, "do not go among them for they will do you harm."

It is useless to say "the Lord, when on earth, mingled with publicans and sinners." When you can go and maintain the standard of God's glory as He did you may go, but never without. Beware of such subterfuges and pleas and excuses. Your only safe course is to keep near to Jesus. This present world hates Him with all its pretentious religion. You have only one thing to do here, and that is to testify against it. "The whole world lieth in the wicked one." Beware how you mingle with it. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Christian mingling with the world, found in its amusements and fashions and follies is that love of the Father in *you*? How can it be?

"Behold me here, in grief draw near,
Pleading at Thy throne, O King;
To Thee each tear, each trembling fear,
Jesus, Son of Man, I bring.
Let me find Thee! let me find Thee!
Me, a vile and worthless thing.

"Look down in love, and from above
With Thy Spirit satisfy;
Thou hast sought me, Thou hast bought me,
And Thy purchase, Lord, am I.
Let me find Thee! let me find Thee,
Here on earth, and then on high!"

"No other prayer to Thee I bear,
O my Lord but only this,
To share Thy grace, to see Thy face,
And to know Thy people's bliss.
Let me find Thee ! let me find Thee !
Thee to find is blessedness.

"Hear the broken, scarcely spoken
Utterance of my heart to Thee ;
All the crying, all the sighing
Of Thy child accepted be.
Let me find Thee ! let me find Thee !
Thus my soul longs vehemently.

"Worldly pleasures, earthly treasures,
Joys and honours will not stay ;
They often pain, and O how vain !
Looking to eternity :
Let me find Thee ! let me find Thee !
Find Thee, O my God, this day !"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TREASURE HID IN A FIELD.

MATT. xiii. 44.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."

CHAPTER XII.

THE TREASURE HID IN A FIELD.

To find Christ! What a treasure! But who does find Him? Only that man finds Christ who is first found *of* Christ.

“But when I first sought Him was it not *I* who sought Him?” Certainly not. You had no desire for Christ—none. You had no will to be saved—none. It is true you have a will, but sin gives that will a bias in every man. You have a will but it is to be *lost*. You never had any other, and no man but One that ever lived had any other. Man’s bias is a part of the nature he now possesses, and it is—to be *lost*.

“But I heard, and I believed, and am now happy.” Yes; but behind all your hearing, and all your believing, and all your coming, there was a power working of which you were not conscious at the time. That power gave you a *disposition* to hear and to believe and to come. If it had not been so you never would, you never could, have come. That power was God the Holy Ghost. That power made the world, and was equally needed to make a *much harder thing* than all the worlds in the universe—a new heart in *you*!

So then it was not you that heard, or you that believed, or you that came. It was God the Holy Ghost, working in you both to *will* and to *do* of *His* good pleasure. Put the crown on the head of Him to whom it belongs—the Holy Ghost! Do not try to wear it yourself. It will never fit *your* guilty head. From all eternity He, and He alone, was destined to wear it. By trying to wear it yourself you cast upon your Father, your Saviour, and upon Him, the foulest dishonour one man can cast upon another.

To say that the glorious world in which we live, so full of wisdom intelligence and design, never had a Creator, is irrational enough surely! But it is not more so to say that natural man has a will to be saved. Like the other, it presents us with an effect without an adequate cause. It tells us the “Ethiopian *can* change his skin, and the leopard his spots.” It shews us “a new creation,” but denies the Author of it! We speak of irrationalism—is not this the very height of it!

But let us look at this treasure to which the soul is thus led, and being thus led, finds.

The kingdom of heaven is not only a general but a particular thing. It is not only an overshadowing “tree” under which you may shelter, but it is “a treasure” which you must have *for yourself*. You may be under the great tree, and partake of many blessings of the Christian dispensation, but this is not enough. You must have it for yourself—a treasure in *your own soul*. There must be a

personal appropriation and such an appropriation as will lead you to surrender joyfully everything you have hitherto valued so highly. This is the aspect of the "kingdom of heaven" which is now presented to us in the parable on which we are entering.

This parable is paired with that of the pearl of great price. "Under these two may be arranged all those who become personally and experimentally acquainted with the truth as it is in Jesus. But some of these find that truth *without seeking*, as this treasure is found; while others find it *after long seeking*—as was the pearl of great price. A man is ploughing a field and suddenly comes upon a treasure. A merchantman goes forth with the express purpose of seeking pearls. Of those who come upon the truth without seeking, as in the case of the treasure, we may name Nathanael or the woman of Samaria. Of those who have gone through life with the avowed object of seeking it, we may mention Anna and Zacharias, and all those of whom it is said "they waited for the Consolation of Israel."

This treasure in the field, however, consisted of *many* things of value. In former days, when changes of dynasties and consequent revolutions were frequent, and society so unsettled, men were accustomed to bury a considerable part of their property in the earth for safety. Perhaps they converted it into jewels or gold or silver, and thus it was hidden. The treasure thus hidden consisted

generally of *many* valuables. The man finds it, and is filled with joy. In the case of the pearl however, that which the man prizes and carries off is *one* pearl. Thus it is that the soul at first finds the treasure Christ Jesus. But there are many things which he finds with it. He finds the unsearchable riches of Christ, the doctrines of Christ, the Word of Christ, all the fruits of the Spirit, the promises and hopes of the gospel—what a manifold treasure fills his soul !

But precious as all these are, one rises in value and importance each day. It is *the* pearl. Many things come up with Christ, but how precious is *He Himself*. Christ Himself is his “exceeding joy.” Is it not so with all believers ? There are priceless treasures with Christ, but oh how inestimably precious is *He*! In this respect this parable corresponds with the merchantman who seeks pearls—many—but ends with *one*, the pearl of great price. We begin by seeking rest for the soul in ordinances, in ministers, in efforts after holiness. The Spirit shews us Christ ; now we have the pearl. We let all sink by the side of this. Not that we undervalue the others. No, but they are the stars; *He* is the sun. And now those stars—

“Sink not in darkest night,
But hide themselves in Heaven’s own light.”

They are all valuable indeed, but their value is that they reflect Jesus and lose themselves in

Jesus. He gives glory to them all. They are all darkness except as He is in them.

In beautiful accordance with this view, we find that *joy* is mentioned with the *sudden* finding of the treasure. It is not so in the case of the pearl. There the thought is *priceless value*—the calmness of mind, the judgment, the firm conviction, that leads to conclusion. And is not this the divine order? Is it not always true, or at any rate generally, that when we first find Jesus our joy is great? As we go on in the Christian life it subsides into settled peace, satisfaction, rest. The joy was tumultuous perhaps at first. There was much of feeling in it: much, perhaps unconsciously, of the physical mingling with it. All this falls off in time, and we have a more matured judgment. Faith has increased. Conviction has taken deep root. We look at the pearl—Jesus! It is priceless! It is beyond heaven and earth in value. “Whom have I in heaven but Thee,” says the soul, “and there is none upon earth I desire in comparison of Thee.” It was joy without *deep root* before. Now it is conviction, faith, rest, peace, and “the joy of the Lord which is our strength.”

Such is the way Scripture ever sets the soul’s history before us. “Ye shall *go out* (of captivity) with *joy*: ye shall be *led forth* with *peace*.” “*Joy and peace in believing.*” When the criminal receives his reprieve, and steps into light and liberty from his dungeon, there is a revulsion of feeling.

He can hardly believe himself. This wears off by habit ; but does he the less prize his liberty ? Nay, but the more. So with the soul. This is ever the order. And the last of all the parables, before the grand separation, is the pearl. So Jesus is last of all. He is the climax—the topstone. The soul can rise no higher. The next event is *separation*. From the pearl we step to that. Why ? Because the man is ready for it. Having Christ the soul is ready—yes, ready for the grand assize !

“Bold shall we stand at that great day,
For who aught to our charge shall lay ;
Our beauty this our glorious dress,
Jesus the Lord our Righteousness.”

But to return to the parable more immediately under consideration—the treasure. What is “the field ? ” I think it is not the world only. It has a much more beautiful signification. It is *anything* in which you find Christ. It may be a sermon, a passage of Scripture, a letter, a word spoken in season. Is Christ in it ? There is the field and its treasure. It is just what the leaven and meal are. What is the meal ? What is the bread ? What is the food of the soul ? Anything that has the leaven—Christ Jesus—in it. What is the treasure ? Christ and all that which He gives us. What is the field ? That in which Christ is contained. Was the field of any value to this man ? None, except what the treasure gave to it. What value has anything to the child of God ? Nothing

but what Christ gives to it. It was the treasure which gave the field any value to this man. It is Jesus and Jesus only, reader, that gives you any value in God's sight. Is He in you? Then *you are the field—precious in God's sight.* Is He not in you? Then you are dead in trespasses and sins—of no value before Him. You have no name in heaven, no history there. You are not “born” into that kingdom yet. How can you be *registered* till you are? How can you have life without birth? How can you have any name, any history there? Death is your only history—dead and yet alive—eternally alive where “the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.”

But we are told that when the man had found the treasure he “hid” it. In what sense is this to be understood? It cannot be that when he has found the truth he should hide it in his own heart, and thus keep it from others. On the contrary, he is commanded to let his light shine before men. Nor can the truth be thus hidden. That which is within will shine as surely as light through the windows. If Andrew finds Jesus, he must go and tell Peter; or if Philip, he too must tell Nathanael. “Come see a Man,” was but the expression of a sight which had so filled the soul of a poor wanderer from God that she could not be silent. What then is this hiding? It is not that another may not find the treasure, but lest *he himself* should lose it. “In the first moments that the truth is revealed to a soul, there may well be a tremulous fear lest

the blessing found should, by some means or other, escape from it again. The anxiety that it may not do so, the jealous precautions for this end taken, would seem to be the truth signified by this concealment of the discovered treasure.” Is not this the history of most of those who have been brought to Christ? How often has the soul trembled with joy, and feared that that joy was too great and too good to last!

But again; “for joy thereof he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.” Observe, here, the expulsive power of the new affection. The joy of the soul is the great motive-power by which it surrenders everything it had held dear for the sake of this treasure. No compulsion is needed. Command is unnecessary. There is a power mightier than either within. This power carries the man along with it. Self-surrender, everything that the soul has hitherto held valuable, is now laid, with joy, at the feet of Jesus. Ease, pleasure, riches, yea reputation itself, is laid on the altar as a living sacrifice to the Saviour. So was it with St Paul: “for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ.” Preaching will not effect this, nor education, nor warnings and threatenings. Nothing will do it but the joy of the Lord in the soul. Men will love themselves, and this world, and their sins. They cannot help it. It is their nature. But let them find this treasure, then will

all be yielded, and the soul stretch forth its hands towards the new prize.

Reader, is this treasure in *you*? Do you know the joy of the Lord, and its power in enabling you to renounce self and sin and the world around you? Have you sold all that you have? Have you really given up your sins, your self-will, your own wisdom? Can you account the loss of this world's goods a treasure if it only bring you into more submission to Christ? Can you count the mortification of your vanity a blessing if it only prostrates you more humbly and unreservedly at the feet of Jesus? Reader, what place has Christ in your heart? what power over your daily life?

But then, we are told, that he "*buyeth* that field." Can Christ be bought with money or price? No: "*come ye, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.*" The thought in this passage is *getting possession*. It was simply that the treasure he had found he was determined to make *his own*. Just as what we buy becomes legally our own, so did this field become this man's. "*I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire.*" In other words it is, *get possession* of this priceless treasure. Let there be no doubt about it. Make it your own. Never rest till you can say, "*Jesus is mine.*" Does not the Lord teach us, in this parable, the doctrine of assurance? Would anything have satisfied this finder of the

treasure short of knowing it to be his own? Nothing. So let it be with you, reader. Count all the treasure as nothing till you have made it yours.

Many have found fault with the conduct of the man in this parable for concealing from the owner of the field the fact of a treasure being in it—thus taking advantage of the owner's ignorance, and making a good bargain. But this arises from pressing the parable too far. Not the man's sin is set before us by the Lord, but the joy of finding the treasure leading to self-sacrifice and surrender. It corresponds exactly with the parable of the unjust steward, in which, not the man's cunning in cheating his master is the thought, but the man's determination to secure a better inheritance when all earthly sources failed. So here. *Make sure* that Christ is yours, is the truth taught in this parable, just as in that one it is to *use the present* as to secure the *future*. The one teaches us a present salvation, the other teaches us to "walk by faith," and "look for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God."

I close this parable with two practical lessons, drawn from its teaching.

First, how many walk *over* the treasure and know it not! It is at their very feet, but they know it not. Again and again it is brought home to them, still they are in ignorance. Their feet are, as it were, on the very soil, and yet they know not of this treasure!

Unconverted reader, thus is it with you. Christ is near you. The treasure is at your side and yet you know it not. The Word is full of Christ, fully and freely offered, without money and without price, and yet He has no attraction for *you*. Why? Your eyes have not been opened by the Holy Ghost. There is over you a thick veil. You see no treasure in Jesus. How awful your state! Angels veil their faces in His presence. The glorified ones before the throne dwell on His name with rapture. All heaven is vocal with His praises, and yet the creation of His own hand is dumb! There is no beauty that *you* should desire Him. Oh are you fit for heaven! Nay, you could not exist there! *There* it is all Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! To you this would simply be *intolerable*! Oh may God the Spirit open your eyes! May He shew you this treasure—Jesus. Then the finder's joy in this parable will be yours, and yours for ever.

But, unconverted reader, you *do* stand in a relation to Christ which you cannot shake off. This treasure is either *under your feet*, or else you have *stooped down* and picked it up. Like the manna which fell during the night all round Israel's tents, they had not to *climb up* into heaven for it. "The Word is *nigh* thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart." It *came down*. "This is the bread which *came down* from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die." "I am that Bread of life." But it not only came down, it lay thick on the ground *at*

every man's tent-door. The Israelite had to do one thing or the other—he must either *stoop* and *pick it up*, or he must *trample* upon it. So with this treasure. You are either stooping to gather it, or it is in your field and you are treading upon it. There is no alternative. Christ is either your treasure, or you are trampling upon Him. He is either in your *heart*, or else He is *beneath your feet*. Reader, where is He? What is Christ to you? What place has He in your heart?

Christian, this treasure was hidden. Everything of value in this world lies beneath the surface. All precious things lie deep. Do not live near the surface, for you will be trodden down by every subject. Go deep. Live before God. *Realities* are out of sight. The outward is only the shell—get at the kernel. All nature is full of voices beckoning you within the inner shrine. Be not a superficial character. Be real. But remember, to be real you must live near to God—you must live within the veil. There is no reality about us except as we touch the Invisible. Oh let us live near Him! In a world of shadows here is the only reality. In a world of danger here is the only security.

“To Calvary ascending
With Jesus let us go,
Beneath the shadow bending
Of all His mighty woe :

The Chief of our salvation,
Should we not follow nigh,
With all His tribulation,
In all His death to die?

“The reward’s faint wayfarer
Must stagger with his load,
Where still the Standard-bearer
Leads up the mountain road :
Wrung out from life’s affliction,
Death has no bitter cup
So sharp, but crucifixion
Has brimmed its sorrows up.

“Does life’s last fever burning
Thy couch with anguish toss ?
His racked limbs had no turning,
His death-bed was the cross :
Each vein of life-drops streaming
From sole to crown divine ;
Has, Death, for thy redeeming
A deeper pang than thine.

“Art poor?—in all thy toiling
See how the Master sped,
His robe, His vesture-spoiling,
His naked, homeless head :
The fox his hole, the sparrow
Has where to lay her nest ;
Those rude beams, hard and narrow,
Are all the Saviour’s rest.

“Have evil-tongued oppressors
Thy reputation torn ?
Hark ! numbered with transgressors,
He bears the robbers’ scorn :
The sharpened nails assailing
Less need the opiate bowl,
Than those fell tongues, impaling
Their iron in his soul.

“ Dost fear the pains of dying
When Death has poised his dart?
See! all those arrows flying
Are gathered in His heart:
A moist wind gently sighing
Is now that furnace blast:
Death, in His bitter crying,
Thy bitterness is past.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

MATT. xliii. 45, 46.

“ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

THE view which many take of the treasure and the pearl is that from which, in these chapters, I have entirely departed. It is this: that the treasure hid in the earth is the Church, for which Christ gave up all His glory and came down on earth to save. The pearl of great price they also regard in the same light. However true this view may be, in a secondary sense, I feel certain it is not the primary meaning of our Lord in these parables. How could the man finding the treasure hide it till he bought it, if this view were correct? Or how could he be said to buy the field when, if the field be the world, it is His already?—for in the tares and wheat it is distinctly called "*his* field." How could Christ be said to come *unexpectedly* on this treasure, as the figure evidently implies? How could He be said to "*find*" it, in the sense of never having known before that it was there? All this, and much more than this, the figure implies, which will in no way harmonise with this view.

Again, as to the "merchantman seeking goodly pearls" and finding one pearl of great price, how can it be said of Christ that He came seeking

“*goodly*” ones if the pearl be the Church? “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was *lost*.” “I came *not* to call the righteous, but *sinners* to repentance.” Again, what “*pearls*” did He seek besides the “*one?*” In no sense will these views bear a close examination. They may be truths derived from them, as I have said; but what we should first seek to find out is the Lord’s mind in them.

These views break the chain, and have been taken up without reference to the context or to the general scope of the parables. They open the door for all kinds of fanciful and extravagant interpretations.

We would remark here, that the same caution is needed in interpreting this parable as is needed in that of the leaven. The kingdom of heaven is not likened unto “leaven,” but unto “leaven *in meal*.” So in this, the kingdom of heaven is not likened unto a merchantman, but “to a merchantman *seeking goodly pearls*.” Unless notice be taken of this we shall fall into error.

In this parable, as in the last, the pearl of great price is something hidden. The kingdom of heaven in the first four parables was something manifested outwardly. In this and the previous one, as well as the following one, it is hidden. It is also appropriated individually. It is man not sheltering himself under the Gospel tree—the *outward* blessings of Christianity—but having Christ *for himself*. Again, it is man *seeking* Christ and finding Him

after diligent search, in contrast with the last parable, which is man finding Christ *without* seeking. Nathanael and the woman of Samaria are types of the first class; Simeon, Zacharias and others, of the second.

Again, the treasure consisted of *many* things found—Christ and all the blessings of His Gospel; Christ in all the riches of His grace. In this it is *one* pearl—Jesus, and Jesus only. True, it has a correspondence with the last in this respect, that the merchantman sets out seeking *many* pearls. Like the seeker of Christ he seeks rest in many quarters—in his faith, or prayers, or tears, or holiness of life. He has not yet found the one, true, and only resting-place for the soul—Jesus. But as a diligent and earnest seeker, the Lord will reveal this to him in due time. The *one* pearl of great price will surely be found, in comparison with which all the other pearls will be valueless. The merchantman seeks no longer when *this* is found. He is satisfied. So with the soul. Jesus found, there it rests. There is no longer the wailing cry, “who will shew us any good?” but the joyful exclamation, “return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.” “Whom have I in heaven but Thee; and there is none upon earth I desire in comparison of Thee.”

Again, it required great skill and practice to discern the one pearl, and great wariness if the merchantman would not have a meaner thing imposed upon him. It is a thing so rare and so

precious that it is obtained only by those who come to know it. How true is all this in its application to the Lord Jesus. There are many false Christs, many ways of salvation, many creeds and systems. Oh how much the soul needs the skill of the Holy Ghost to discover the true Pearl! Christ is only known to that soul to whom the Holy Spirit reveals Him. To all others "there is no beauty that they should desire Him." No wonder that *many* pearls were offered to the seeker here. No wonder that they were all so like the real pearl that an ordinary observer would have been deceived. Where the truth is there must be many counterfeits, and the more true and beautiful anything is, the greater the number and the more danger of being deceived.

So is it spiritually. There are many Antichrists now—many false religions. Multitudes are deceived by appearances. Not being enlightened by God's Holy Spirit, the spurious is accepted as genuine, the unreal for the real. Thus man is mocked. Thus the soul is cheated. But the truth is *one*, and it is Jesus. But to know this one precious Pearl the soul must have its eyes opened by the Holy Spirit, or it can never see it. It requires His skill to know the Pearl of great price. Never shall we be out of danger of mistaking the false from the true, unless taught by Him.

It is striking to notice another truth here. The pearl is the last of these parables previous to the great and final separation; and, associated with this, is the great danger of mistaking the *real* Pearl

for the many counterfeits. So will it be at the close of this dispensation. Christ and only Christ will be the Church's safety, the believer's rest. But there will arise false Christs, and the difficulties and dangers to the soul will be greater than it has ever been before. This is why I believe the Pearl and its counterfeits are put as the *last* of the parables, and are closely followed by the final separation. The ranks are even now fast closing in. Those who know and love and follow the Saviour have but one motto one watchword, "Jesus only." Christendom with its thousand systems of religion are the many imitation pearls. With these the professing Church, in one form or another, will be found taking up when the Lord comes. It is Jesus on one side, and the many different forms of religion without Christ on the other. Reader, are you taking *your* stand on the Rock of Ages? Is "Jesus only" your peace, your rest, your joy, your all?

Again, we have the expulsive power of the new affection brought before us in this parable, as in the former one. The merchantman, "when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." Christ is so precious to the soul, of such priceless value, that its whole being is drawn after Him. Self is sacrificed. There is entire consecration. Everything is laid on the altar as a living sacrifice. In the soul's estimate Jesus outweighs ten thousand worlds, yea heaven itself. Words cannot express, thought cannot

conceive, what He is now. The language of the heart is—

“Jesus, these eyes have never seen
That radiant form of Thine :
The veil of flesh hangs dark between
Thy blessed face and mine.

“I see Thee not, I hear Thee not,
Yet art Thou oft with me ;
And earth hath ne'er so dear a spot
As when I meet with Thee.”

How constantly the truth is brought before us in God's Word that the resting-place of the soul is in *One*, and that the Lord Jesus! “Martha is troubled about *many* things;” Mary has found that only “*one* thing is needful.” “This *one* thing I do” said the Apostle Paul. “My soul thirsteth for *Thee*” was David's cry. “They have taken away *my Lord*” exclaimed the weeping Magdalene at the sepulchre. “None but *Jesus*” exclaimed the martyr at the stake, while the fire and faggots were being heaped thickly upon him.

“There is only *one* pearl, since the truth is *one*, even as God is one; and the truth possessed, restores that unity into the heart of man which sin had destroyed. The heart which, through sin, had become as a mirror shattered into a thousand fragments, and every fragment reflecting some different object, is now re-united, and the whole with more or less clearness reflects, as it was intended at first to do, the one image of God. It is God alone in whom any intelligent creature can find its centre and true repose. Only when man has found *Him* does the great *Eureka* burst from his lips in Augustine's beautiful and often-quoted words, ‘Lord, Thou

hast made us *for* Thee, and our heart is disquieted till it resteth in Thee.’’ *

There are many respects in which the fitness and beauty of the pearl to represent the Lord Jesus may be seen. For pearls, perfect of their kind, incredible sums of money were given; and “the pearl of great price” was called by names denoting the estimate in which it was held—“the Pure,” and “the Beloved.”

But there are two special aspects in which “the pearl of great price” may be regarded as fitly and beautifully shadowing forth the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first is, that in its own nature it reflected the *waters of this world in which it was formed*, and also the *brightness of the sun*. Thus it shadows forth the human and divine nature of the Son of God. Just as the pearl is formed in the waters of the ocean, so was the Lord Jesus produced from the sea of our humanity—brought up from its depths and presented in all the beauty and glory of His person and work as “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of His person.” The pearl did not differ in its *nature* from the other pearls; it differed only in its *perfectness*. So with the Lord Jesus. “Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He likewise Himself took part of the same.” Thus while He was of the same nature with ourselves, He was, at the same time, perfectly free from even

* Trench on the Parables, p. 137.

the very shadow of sin in that nature : “that *holy thing* that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

The second aspect in which the pearl of great price so fitly and beautifully represents the Lord Jesus is that it is *especially the jewel fitted for the daylight.*

“ We do not find the diamond spoken of in Scripture in the same connection as we do the pearl. Our festivals are most of them by night, and the diamond glitters in the brightness that we can kindle in our nightly lights ; but the pearl shines best by day, and so it is indeed a beautiful image of Him whose human nature, in the resplendence of the divine brightness, is the true day, that alone can pour pure light upon this world, and is thus the resplendent pearl of great price, fitted to shine forth to the praise and glory of the Divine Being, received upon the beauteous surface of perfected humanity ; the one pearl of great price, who is especially the jewel of the day ; the prize that is chosen by the heart, and precious to the souls of those who are not children of the night, with all its pleasures of darkness, but are the children of the day, with all its pleasures of holiness and blessed enjoyment. And in this point of view we do not find the pearl in all the precious stones that form the garnishing of that heavenly city—that holy Jerusalem that cometh down out of heaven from God. All the walls of that city were built of various precious stones : there the jasper, the sapphire, the chalcedony, the emerald, and the sardonyx, and other precious stones, but no pearls. It is only at the gates of that city that we find the pearl. There each gate was one pearl. And this fixes the pearl of great price upon our blessed Saviour : it is the image that is intended to set before us the Lord Jesus Christ, the true gate into the city of the everlasting God ; the true entrance into the holy city ; the New Jerusalem, which has the glory of God ; the divine and heavenly city,

which can alone be the light of the glory of a purified and glorified world. Every separate gate was one pearl, not a collection of pearls joined together with any curious skill of the workman, but each one pearl, such as earth never saw for greatness or for glory. One pearl, large enough to be the gate of the eternal city, and pure enough to stand there unspotted in the brightness of everlasting light. Although there were twelve gates to that city, each gate was formed only of one thing, one whole undivided thing, one pearl, in order to show us the true entrance into God's everlasting kingdom, into the heavenly city ; not that it is intended to set before us twelve saviours, but each being but a symbol, they all set before us the one Saviour. And the same we find in the tabernacle built by Moses : we have a curtain at the entrance, a curtain into the priestly part, and a curtain into the entrance of the holiest of all, made of the same materials. Christ in the beginning, Christ in the middle, Christ in the end. So it is with this heavenly city : into whatever gate you desire to enter, wherever you can find an opening in the walls, and a gate there, you see the same thing before you : every single gate was according to one fashion, made of one material—Christ. Each one was intended to open out to us the same One Being, He who alone can say, ‘I am the Door ; by Me, if any man enter in, he shall go in and out, and find pasture.’ Here is that gate which is never shut, an entrance into the holy city, which being thus always open, those who are prepared shall enter therein. The defiled shall not enter there. And yet those that had been defiled, but are now washed, and sanctified, and made white, these shall find their ingress and their egress to that everlasting city, which is indeed the glory of God and the blessedness of everlasting joy.”*

But observe, not only is the man represented as at first seeking *many* pearls and at last finding one, it is no *mean* thing he seeks. It is *pearls*

* Rev. Dr Baylee, “Lectures on the Parables.”

—something good, excellent, noble. So with man. He seeks the satisfaction of his soul in many things—*high* and *noble* things. He seeks it in goodness, purity, faith, and prayer, but ends in finding Him in whom all these are concentrated as the rays in the sun—the Lord Jesus. There every affection, every desire, every longing of the soul is met.

But besides representing a seeker of goodly pearls in the light of Christianity under which we now live, there have been at all times, earnest souls stretching forth towards this one pearl, who have never known Christianity. In unconscious and inarticulate utterances they have yearned for that which has only been fully manifested to us in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Age after age heathendom, in its gropings amid the deep darkness and guilt in which it was enveloped, gave forth its longings for *something*—something beyond itself which, when Jesus the Son of God came in the fulness of time, received its answer. I cannot do better than close this chapter with an illustration of what I mean from the pen of a great and gifted Christian writer and dignitary of our Church, to whom I have before referred, and to whose writings the Church of Christ is more indebted than to the writings of almost any other of modern times. I mean those of Archbishop Trench. In his “Hulsean Lectures for 1845 and 1846,” he says—

“The Greek mind could conceive of a much-suffering man lifted up for his toils’ and virtues’ sake into the highest hea-

ven. Their pantheon is full of such—of heroes after the toils and conflicts of a life worthily spent for their fellow-men, made free of heaven, and admitted even into the circle of the immortal gods ; and so far they had in their popular belief anticipations of Him, the man Christ Jesus, whom, because He humbled Himself, and for our sakes became obedient to the death of the cross, therefore God greatly exalted, setting Him at His own right hand.

“ But yet how little was there here any true blending of the human and divine ; and how entirely men felt this ; as is wonderfully testified by the fact that this exalted and glorified man, however many divine attributes were added to him, yet did not get the name of God ; he was but a *δαιμων* after all ; he was not, to use the language which has been well used of the Son, *Deus ex radice*. They felt with a right instinct that a deified man did not thereby, and that indeed he could not, become God—that no accumulation of divine honours could make one truly God, who was not such already ; even as the Church, in a later day, was not to be deceived into accepting the Arian theory concerning the Son of God as an adequate substitute for her own, by the utmost prodigality of divine names and titles and honours which were proposed to be lavished upon Him. She felt rightly that all these would not in the least fill up the chasm that divided, and must divide for ever, God from that which was not God. So was it with the apotheosis of heroic men : the divine glory did but gild and play upon the surface of their being ; if a man was to be also God, if there was to be any perfect union of the two, it must be by other means, by a process which must reach deeper and much further back than this.

“ But moreover the other half, the other factor, even of the idea of such a person as this, was altogether strange to the Greek mind. A God coming down from heaven, emptying Himself of His glory, and in a noble suffering undertaking a human life, and, that He might be the helper and deliverer of men, enduring all, even the hardest, for them, tasting death itself—all this, a God thus stooping, and suffering, and dying,

was wholly alien to every conception of theirs. The very idea of the gods with them was of beings free from all care, untouched by any sorrow, living ever joyful, and ever at ease; or if they sojourned for a while in this toilsome and tearful world, yet sojourning as visitors only—not touching the burden of its woe with the tip of their finger—undertaking, it might be, human tasks, yet undertaking them in sport, not really coming under or feeling their weight. True, indeed, that this conception of a suffering God, which was so strange to all Western habits of thought, was familiar to the mythologies of the East. They have their Osiris,—and not him alone, though in him these sufferings of a divine nature come the most prominently and gloriously out—who in the fulness of his beneficent purposes for the race of men, and in mighty and earnest conflict with the prince of evil, endures all things, going down even to the deeps of death: and thus, no doubt, the Eastern religions were not without their anticipations of Him, who though He was rich, yet made Himself poor, even the poorest, for us, that we through His poverty might be rich.

“And yet how imperfect, even as regards the idea, was this as well. Humanity, however it craved a God for its deliverer, yet craved just as earnestly a man; it wanted a Redeemer out of its own bosom, one in whose every triumph over moral or physical evil it could rejoice that ‘God had given such power *unto men*.’ It felt, and truly, that no other would serve its turn—that, forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also, if He would be every man’s brother, and thus able to be every man’s Redeemer, may be partaker of the same; ‘fairer than the children of men,’ and yet Himself a child of man—that from the midst of itself, from the depths of its own life, its Redeemer must proceed. A God who was *only* God might conquer for Himself, but there was no pledge or proof in His conquest that man could conquer; a God who overcame death and rose from the dead gave no assurance thereby of a resurrection for the race of man.

" And thus each of the great divisions of the Gentile world had but a fragment, even in thought and desire, of the truth : the Greek world, the exaltation of manhood—the Oriental, the glorious humiliations of Godhead ; and thus it came to pass that each of these, even as a speculation, was maimed and imperfect. These systems, so far from providing what man needed, had not satisfactorily and on every side even contemplated what he needed ; much less had they given it.

" And how could it be given indeed ? This was the riddle which He alone, whose counsels were from everlasting, who knew all the true needs of man, and meant to satisfy them all, could solve. It seemed, indeed, that the world, craving one who should be man no less than God for its deliverer, put its demands in irreconcilable contradiction with themselves ; and again, that demanding for its Redeemer one in whom the human and divine should not slightly and transiently touch one another, but should be brought into innermost union, it here too required that which it was impossible that it ever should receive. And yet the same wonder-stroke of God solved both these problems in one.

" The first difficulty was this, If the world needed a man, yet where and how should it find the man that it needed ? It had often put forth its champions, but there was ever found an attainer of blood in every man's descent, a blot on every man's scutcheon, a flaw in every man's armour. If no helper of humanity but one born out of its own bosom would do, and yet every one born from thence partook in its sin, was one needing to be healed, and who could not therefore be himself the healer, was himself a sharer in the diseased organism, and could not therefore expel its poison from others, whence was such a one to come ? The answer was at length given in the Virgin-born. Men had long before had an obscure apprehension that only so could the difficulty be solved. The birth from a pure virgin had been attributed to many, to founders of new religions, as Buddha and Zoroaster, above all. For there was that in men's hearts which told them that for one to be an effectual Saviour, He must be a

ew beginning, a new head of the race ; not a mere link in the chain of sinful humanity, since of the sinful the Sinless could never come ; but by such marvellous means as that miraculous conception He must be exempted from the corruption transmitted from generation to generation of the fallen children of men.

“ But this was not all ; this Virgin-born was also Immanuel, was that which men had asked for, ‘ God with us.’ He had indeed a Father, but that Father was God ; and thus in the deepest deep, in the innermost core and centre of His life this Man was also God. In the cradle of Bethlehem, after that a pure Virgin had been touched with fire from heaven, and had borne a Son, in Him at length the world found all its longings fulfilled, its seemingly irreconcilable desires all satisfied and atoned.

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“ We may boldly say that the highest philosophy of the old world did concern itself with a redemption—not of course with a Redeemer, for of such it knew not ; but it did avowedly set before itself as its aim and purpose the helping of souls to a birth out of a world of shows and appearances into the world of realities, out of a world of falsehood into one of truth, turning them from darkness to light, from the contemplation of shadows to the contemplation of substance. That favourite saying of Socrates that he exercised still the craft of his mother, that his task and work, his mission in the world, was such a helping of souls to the birth, by the helping to a birth the conceptions which were struggling there, this rested on no other thought—was in its kind, and however remotely, a prelude to far mightier truth, the earthly anticipation of an heavenly word—of *His* word who said, ‘ Ye must be born again.’ It pointed, although at an infinite distance, to the possibility of a birth into a kingdom, not merely of reality as opposed to semblance, but of holiness as opposed to sin.

“ What, again, is ‘ Know thyself,’ that great saying of the heathen philosophy, in which, when turning from being

merely physical, and a speculation about natural appearances, the sun, the moon, and the stars, it made man and man's being the region of its inquiries, the riddles of humanity, those which it sought to solve—what was that 'Know thyself,' that great word in which it embodied and expressed so well its own character and aim, and all that it proposed to effect, but a preparation afar off for a higher word, for that 'Repent ye,' with which the Gospel should begin? For let only that precept be faithfully carried out, and in what else could it issue but repentance? or at least in what else but in an earnest longing after this great change of heart and life? For out of this self-knowledge nothing else but self-loathing could grow—so that men being once come, as they presently must, to a consciousness of their error and their departure from goodness and truth, should hate themselves, and flee from themselves to whatever higher guide was offered them, to the end that they might become different men, and not remain the same which before they were. What could any man behold himself, if only he beheld himself aright, but, to use the wonderful comparison of Plato, as that sea-god, in whom the pristine form was now scarcely to be recognised, so were some limbs of his body broken off, and some marred and battered by the violence of the waves, while further, shells and stones and sea-weed had clung to and overgrown them, till he bore a resemblance rather to some monster than to that which by nature he was? What was man but such a wreck of his nobler self? what but such a monster could he shew in his own eyes, if only he could be prevailed to fix those eyes steadfastly upon himself?

"And when men, thus learning their fall, and how great it was, learned also to long for their restoration, very interesting and instructive is it to observe how Christ realised for yearning souls not only the very thing which they asked for, but that in the very forms under which they had asked it; most instructive to observe how the very language in which Scripture sets forth the gifts which a Saviour brings, was a language which more or less had been used already to set forth

the blessings which men wanted, or which from others they had most imperfectly obtained—the Gospel of Christ, falling in not only with the wants of souls, but with the very language in which those wants had found utterance.

“Thus there had continually spoken out in men a sense of that which they needed to be done for them, as a *healing*, as a binding up of hurts, a stanching of wounds. The heart of the physician did but image forth a higher cure and care which should concern itself not with the bodies, but with the souls, of men. They were but the branches of one and the same discipline—so much so, that the same god who was conceived master in one, the soother of passions, was master also in the other, the healer of diseases. It was conceived of sins as of stripes and wounds, which would leave their livid marks, their enduring scars, on the miserable souls of those who had committed them;—who should carry these evidences of their guilt, visibly impressed on them for ever, into that dark world, and before those awful judgment-seats, whither after death they were bound.

“How deep the corresponding image of Christ’s work as a work of healing reaches in Scripture, I need not remind you. His ministry of grace had been set forth in language borrowed from this art, by prophets who went before; He should be anointed to heal the broken-hearted, to bind up the bruised; and when He began that ministry, He claimed these prophecies for Himself, laying His finger on the most signal among them, and saying, ‘This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.’

“Thus did the Son of God, at His coming in the flesh, take up the unfulfilled promises of all human systems. For they *were* unfulfilled; those systems had wrought no deliverance worthy of the name in the earth. How scanty was the number of those whom they would even undertake to save—a few highly favoured or greatly gifted spirits of the world, not the poor, the ignorant, the weak; in this how different from that Gospel which is preached to the poor, and whose tidings

are good because they are these—that the Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall put their trust therein! But theirs was essentially an *aristocratic* salvation, which should help a few, setting them apart from their fellows, on pinnacles from whence they were in danger of looking down far more with gratulation at their own deliverance than with any inward and bleeding compassion for the multitudes which were toiling and vainly seeking for a path below.

“What they could not give, He gave. For here we come back again to a point which I have pressed already, but which yet is so important that I shall make no apology for pressing it once more, which is this,—that the prerogative of our Christian faith, the secret of its strength, is, that all which it has, and all which it offers, is laid up in a person. This is what has made *it* strong, while so much else has proved weak, that it has a Christ as its middle point—that it is not a circumference without a centre—that it has not merely a deliverance, but a Deliverer—not a redemption only, but a Redeemer as well. This is what makes it fit for wayfaring men; this is what makes *it* sunlight, and all else compared with it but as moonlight;—fair it may be, but cold and ineffectual; while here the light and the life are one; the Light is also the life of men. Oh, how great the difference between submitting ourselves to a complex of rules, and casting ourselves upon a beating heart; between accepting a system, and cleaving to a person! And how tenfold blessed the advantages of the last, if that person is such an One that there shall be nothing servile in the entire resignation of ourselves to be taught of Him, for He is the absolute Truth—nothing unmanly in the yielding of our whole being to be wholly moulded by Him, for that He is not merely the highest which humanity has reached, but the highest which it can reach—its intended and ideal perfection, at once its perfect image and superior Lord!

“For, brethren, had *we* a system only, it would leave us

just as weak as other systems have left their votaries. We should have to confess that we found in ours, as they in theirs, no adequate strength, and that not merely now and then, and at ever-rarer intervals, we were worsted in our conflict with the sin of our own hearts, but evermore. Our blessedness—and let us not miss that blessedness—is, that our treasures are treasured in a person, and are therefore inexhaustible—in one who *requires* nothing but what first He *gives*—who is not for one generation a present teacher and a living Lord, and then for all succeeding a past and a dead one, but who is present and living for all—as truly for us in this later day, as for them who went up and down with Him in the days of His flesh. Our strength and our blessedness is, that what we have to know is ‘the truth as it is in Jesus;’ that what we have to learn is to ‘learn Christ;’ that what we have to put on, is to ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ and the righteousness which is from Him.”

“ Jesu, solace of my soul,
 Gentle Mediator,
 King of kings from pole to pole,
 Heaven and earth’s Creator !
 Who can praise Thee as he ought,
 Thee, the world-wide Wonder—
 Tell what pangs our sorrows wrought,
 Rending Thee asunder ?

“ Love, it drew Thee from the sky,
 Love of souls that perished,
 Leaving, here on earth to die,
 All Thy glories cherished:
 Born into the vale of tears,
 There, Thyself, more tearful,
 Toiling up the steep of years
 To a height more fearful.

“ Born life’s saddest paths to tread,
 Thou, the world’s Salvation;
 Hungry, Thou, the Living Bread,
 In its desolation ;

Thou, the fourfold river's Fount,
Paradise all steeping,
Thirsting on the cursèd Mount,
In the Garden weeping.

“ Oh, the depth, the breadth, the height,
Of Thy love's extension !
Jesu, oh, the wondrous might
Of thy condescension !
Innocency's purest bloom
All Thy foes refuting,
Bearing all our sorrows' doom,
All our sins' imputing !

“ Mine the while the joys of life,
Thine its tribulation ;
Mine the glory of the strife,
Thine the consternation ;
Mine the banquet's sweetness all,
Thine the self-devotion,
Thine the vinegar and gall
For Thy bitter potion.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DRAW-NET.

MATT. xiii. 47-50.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind : which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world : the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DRAW-NET.

WE have now reached the last of the seven parables —the draw-net containing good and bad fish. This is paired with that of the tares and wheat; only that the leading idea in the latter is that evil is permitted to mingle with the good, while in this parable the leading idea is that of final separation.

All the ideas of the parables we have been considering are from the shore and the sea. The Lord, in this parable, turns to the sea the fish and the nets, to illustrate His kingdom. If He *Himself* were the first Sower of the seed, in this parable He clearly includes His *disciples* as fishers of men. They are now the great fishers and workmen in His kingdom, whose nets will bring together fish of every kind, until the great separation takes place.

The leading idea which pervades the last three parables is that vital Christianity is *concealed from view*. In the first case the Gospel is a happy discovery unsought; in the second it was found after deliberate and diligent seeking; in this parable it is the *experience of the final separation*, when Christians shall be separated and put into a clean vessel, and shall enter into the joy of their

Lord. The judgment in this parable is exhibited in all its fulness. In the first of the seven parables the *negative* features of judgment are seen—the land yielded no fruit. In the tares and wheat it was seen descending on the *real authors* of spiritual evil in the earth. In this *every kind of unclean animal* is doomed to share the fiery judgments on the wicked. Thus there is a development of judgment in the three—the fullest being in *this* parable, because the *final* one.

The net in this parable is a *hauling*-net, not a *casting*-net. “On the coast of Cornwall, where the seine is well known, it is sometimes half a mile long. Leaded below, so that it may sweep the bottom of the sea, and supported with corks above, it is carried out so as to enclose a large space of sea. The ends are then brought together, and it, with all it contains”—good and bad fish, sea-weed, sand and mud—“is drawn up to the shore.” Thus the kingdom of heaven is not now a single net cast into the sea, like those of Peter and Zebedee, gathering a few here and a few there, but a great draw-net cast down into the sea of this world, covering as it were, the bottom of the sea, and remaining there, gathering of every kind, and to be drawn up to view—to be made manifest with everything in it at the close of this dispensation, described as the *shore*.

One point to be observed is, that all this variety and diversity of fish and weed and mud, is in the sea and yet in the net at the same time. So is it

now. All are in the net of the kingdom—*the visible Church of Christ*—and yet all are in the sea of *this world*. The entire Church is *one* net, the whole kingdom of heaven *one* draught of fishes. The visible Church is in the restless troubled sea of a fallen world. Who goes into this net, or whether they are good or bad, we cannot yet determine. But “the day will declare, for it shall be revealed by fire.”

But with all the variety in this net, there are only two kinds of which any account will be taken *on the shore*—those who are the Lord’s, and those who are not. Reader, to one or the other of these you will then belong. To one or the other you belong *at this very moment*. I solemnly ask you—to which?

Though this parable may have a reference to the mixed character of the kingdom in this present dispensation, we must bear in mind that it is only in a secondary sense this view can be admitted. The scope of the parable is not to show who *at present belong to Christ’s kingdom*, but who *hereafter shall be excluded from future glory*. The Church will always be a mixed body. The tares and the wheat are to grow side by side both in the Church and in the world till the harvest. This is as truly a law of the kingdom of heaven as it is a law of nature, where we see on the roadside, growing together, the poison and its antidote. But though this is so, we have no right to read in this parable the view to which we have alluded in any

other than an indirect sense. Its aspect is entirely a future one. The Lord is at hand. Now the servants are "gathering together all, good and bad," to the marriage-supper. Who of us shall have on the wedding-garment? Shall we be eternally with Him whom we have known and loved on earth, or shall we be filled with "shame and everlasting contempt?" This is the primary view, and the solemn thought suggested by it.

We must not omit to notice the contrast between this parable and that of the tares, with which it is paired. Judgment is seen, indeed, in the tares, but under entirely a new point of view. The leading thought in the tares is that judgment is delayed, sin tolerated, grace bearing with evil for the elects' sake. In this parable the words "good" and "bad" bring before us judgment from that point of view which looks at the *essential worth of individuals*. The "good" form collectively an essential heaven; the "bad" an essential hell. Separation is made accordingly.

Again, the tares are hidden but *presently* seen; but the fish are hidden *till drawn up*. The tares *spring up*—the result of *principles* sown. The fish are *drawn up*—for the purpose of *judgment*.

This design in the parable is clearly shadowed forth from our blessed Lord's own words. The fishers are not even named. In the interpretation our Lord passes over altogether the *beginning* of the figure, and draws special attention to the *close*, where the real issue of the matter lay. In the

parable of the tares and the wheat the Lord lays the greatest stress on the *earlier* part. This is the leading idea in His mind. He brings before us the *separation*, but it is not the *leading* thought. In the draw-net it is. It is thus the two parables are *rightly* paired—the one being the beginning and continuation of the present dispensation, the other the ending of it.

The angels are said here to *come forth*. They have hitherto been hidden from men's view, but now they come forth from concealment—from the throne of God—to gather together His elect and to bring them to glory.

The judgment, too, will be deliberate. We are told “they *sat* down.” There shall be no hasty work. All shall be gone into with a minuteness and an impartiality the world has never yet seen. All shall be *righteous* judgment. “The one shall be taken, the other left.” The good are gathered into *vessels*, indicating their *future* purpose—to be *used* of the Lord. The bad are *not* put into vessels. They *cannot* be used. They are useless—only fit to be cast away. They are “*cast away*”—as something vile, refuse, and hateful. No wonder Chrysostom should call this “*a terrible parable*;” that Gregory the Great should say it was a parable “to be feared rather than expounded.”

The drag-net so covering the bottom of the sea denotes the far-reaching efficacy of the Gospel of Christ. During the whole time it is in the sea of this world men are *hidden* in it. The Lord's people

are hidden. Men see them not, and know not their heavenly origin and end. Bad men are hidden, too, under the cloak of religion. The one seems to the outward eye as good as the other. But soon the net will be drawn up. The secrets of all hearts shall be made known. The *shore* will settle the destiny of each, and settle it righteously, holily, justly, and for ever.

Reader, how solemn the thought that you may be in the net, the visible Church, but be “cast away”—*flung* away as something *accursed*, into “a furnace of fire!” Oh you can make this mistake but *once!* Are you “good” or are you, though in the net, “bad?” Are you “good”—in Christ? or are you “bad”—out of Christ? You may *hide* yourself from view now in the troubled sea of life, and may pass for one *very* “good,” but when God sends for you!—*what then?* There will be no hiding-places then. There will be no masks there. Open, naked, exposed, every line of your past history laid bare, written in letters of light that shall come home to conscience with such vividness and intensity that the chambers of the soul will become the very “hell” you have perhaps so often denied. Ah! this will be hell. This will be the torment of the damned. A hell—deny it if you will! Struggle against it as you may. Sneer if you like at these “old-fashioned brimstone ideas.” Let your torpid or stifled conscience mock these notions, and hide itself under the delusion. But *there is a hell*, and

the Saviour's own words too plainly declare it in this chapter! It is not fire. It is not brimstone. Light would indeed be the suffering if it were. No. It is conscience stifled through life, but wakened up under the light of God's holy countenance as in a moment. It is memory bringing back in an instant every line of the dark past, and lighting up a fire in the soul that no pleas or excuses can hide, and lighting it up for ever. It is MEMORY touching with its lighted match the train you have been laying through life, and kindling a fire there that language is impotent to describe. It calls it "fire and brimstone," but, oh the *poverty* of language! And it shall be all this "for ever"—"where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched."

Reader, I warn you in my Master's name! You are living under a mask now. You are living in the midst of shadows now. But this is a REALITY! How will it find *you*? "May God have mercy on your soul!"

"Such is the kingdom of God; and as it is now hidden, so in due season it shall be revealed. Men think that they are lords of the world, and may do as they will. They think this earth their property, and its movements in their power, whereas it has other lords besides them, and is the scene of a higher conflict than they are capable of conceiving. It contains Christ's little ones whom they despise, and His angels whom they disbelieve; and these at length shall take possession of it and be manifested. At present, 'all things,' to appearance, 'continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;' and scoffers ask, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' but at the appointed time there will be a 'mani-

festation of the sons of God,' and the hidden saints 'shall shine out as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.' When the angels appeared to the shepherds, it ~~was~~ sudden appearance,—' *Suddenly* there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host.' How wonderful a sight! The night had before that seemed just like any other night; as the evening on which Jacob saw the vision seemed like any other evening. They were keeping watch over their sheep; they were watching the night as it passed. The stars moved on—it was midnight. They had no idea of such a thing when the angel appeared. Such are the power and virtue hidden in things which are seen, and at God's will they are manifested. They were manifested for a moment to Jacob, for a moment to Elisha's servant, for a moment to the shepherds. They will be manifested for ever when Christ comes at the Last Day 'in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.' Then this world will fade away, and the other world will shine forth.

"How different is a tree, how different the prospect, when leaves are on it and off it! How unlikely it would seem, before the event, that the dry and naked branches should suddenly be clothed with what is so bright and so refreshing! Yet in God's good time leaves come on the trees. The season may delay, but come it will at last. So it is with the coming of that Eternal Spring, for which all Christians are waiting. Come it will, though it delay; yet though it tarry, let us wait for it, 'because it will surely come, it will not tarry.' Therefore we say day by day, 'Thy kingdom come'; which means—O Lord, show Thyself; manifest Thyself; Thou that sittest between the cherubim, show Thyself; stir up Thy strength, and come and help us. The earth that we see does not satisfy us; it is but a beginning; it is but a promise of something beyond it; even when it is gayest, with all its blossoms on, and shows most touchingly what lies hid in it, yet it is not enough. We know much more lies hid in it than we see. A world of saints and angels, a glorious world, the palace of God, the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, the heavenly Jerusalem, the throne of God and Christ, all

these wonders, everlasting, all-precious, mysterious, and incomprehensible, lie hid in what we see. What we see is the outward shell of ~~an~~ eternal kingdom ; and on that kingdom we fix the eyes of our faith. Shine forth, O Lord, as when on Thy nativity Thine angels visited the shepherds ; let Thy glory blossom forth as bloom and foliage on the trees ; change with Thy mighty power this visible world into that diviner world, which as yet we see not ; destroy what we see, that it may pass and be transformed into what we believe. Bright as is the sun, and the sky, and the clouds ; green as are the leaves and the fields ; sweet as is the singing of the birds ; we know that they are not all, and we will not take up with a part for the whole. They proceed from a centre of love and goodness, which is God Himself ; but they are not His fulness ; they speak of heaven, but they are not heaven ; they are but as stray beams and dim reflections of His Image ; they are but crumbs from the table. We are looking for the coming of the day of God, when all this outward world, fair though it be, shall perish ; when the heavens shall be burnt, and the earth melt away.

" Year passes after year silently ; Christ's coming is even nearer than it was. Oh, that, as He comes nearer earth, we may approach nearer heaven ! O Christian, pray Him to give you the heart to seek Him. Pray Him to make you in earnest. You have one work only, to bear your cross after Him. Resolve in His strength to do so. Resolve to be no longer beguiled by 'shadows of religion,' by words, or by disputings, or by notions, or by high professions, or by excuses, or by the world's promises or threats. Pray Him to give you what Scripture calls 'an honest and good heart,' or 'a perfect heart,' and, without waiting, begin at once to obey Him with the best heart you have. Any obedience is better than none—any profession which is disjoined from obedience is a mere pretence and deceit. Any religion which does not bring you nearer to God is of the world. You have to seek His face ; obedience is the only way of seeing Him. All your duties are obediences. . . . Every act of obedience is an

approach—an approach to Him who is not far off, though He seems so, but close behind this visible screen of things which hides Him from us. He is behind ~~the~~ material framework ; earth and sky are but a veil going between Him and us ; the day will come when He will rend that veil, and show Himself to us. And then, according as we have waited for Him, will He recompense us. If we have forgotten Him, He will not know us ; but ‘blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching. . . . He shall gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants’ (Luke xii. 37, 38). May this be the portion of every one of us ! It is hard to attain it ; but it is woful to fail. Life is short ; death is certain ; and the world to come is everlasting.” *

“ The quiet whispers of the hour—
 The month’s loud echoes fly—
 The solemn tramp of years
 Are registered on high !
 What record have they borne for thee
 Into that dread Eternity ?

“ What, in the pages of that Book
 Of God’s Remembrance kept,
 Is written of thy loving deeds,
 Or tears o’er sinners wept ?
 How hast thou used the talents given ?
 What meetness made with them for heaven ?

“ Can it be said—that what ‘she could’
 Was gladly done by thee ?
 Or have thy talents all been spent
 On sin and vanity ?
 Oh, wasted hours ! how dark their tale,
 When no repentance can avail !

* Rev. Dr. Newman’s Sermons.

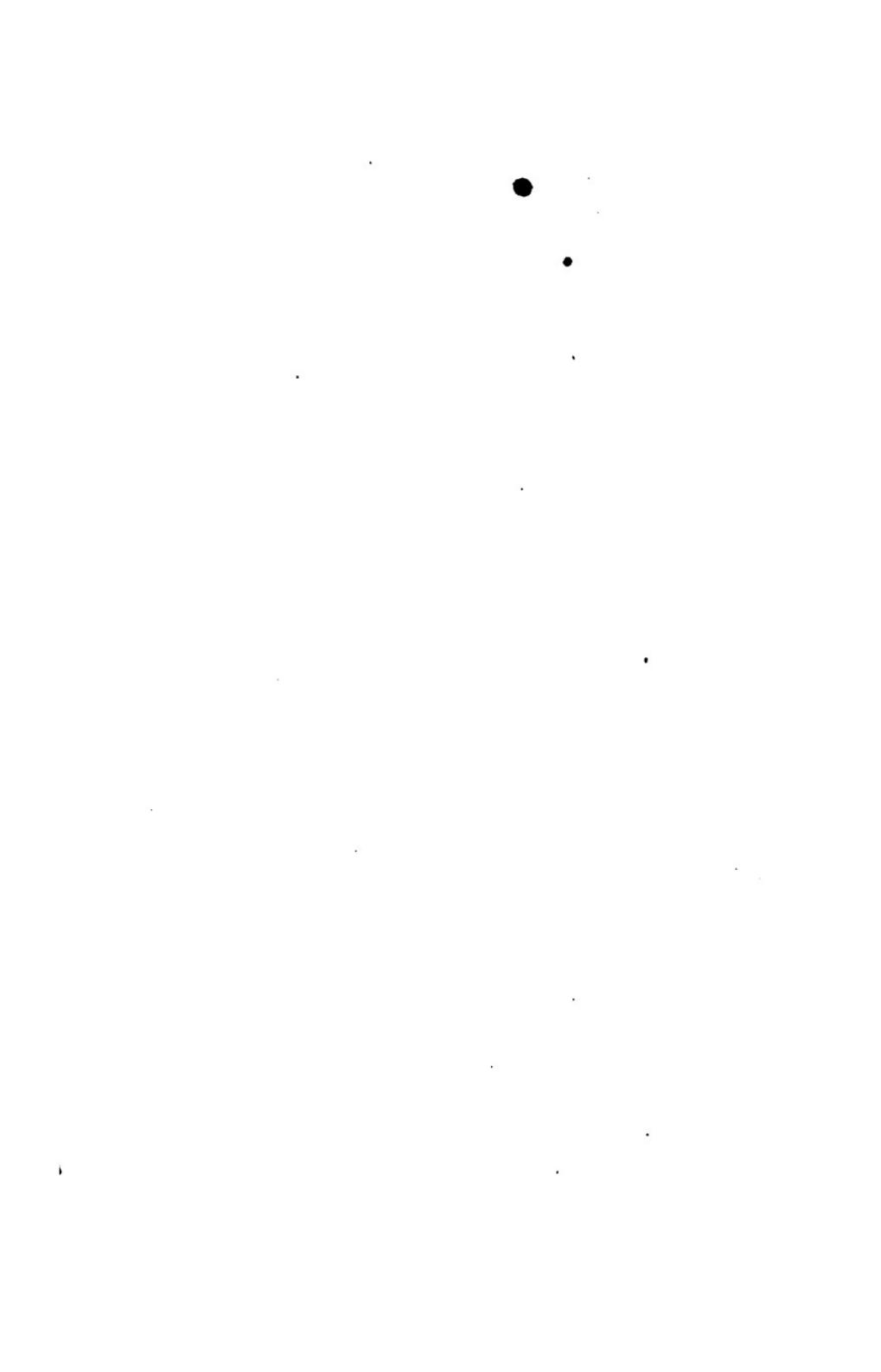
“Triflers of earth, awake ! awake !
Think not, because ye sleep,
That from the idle dreams of sin
Ye will not wake—to weep !
Your dreaming days will soon be o'er—
You'll sleep the sleep of sin no more.

“The record's going up on high,
Of hours on folly spent ;
Ponder a lost Eternity !
Repent ! repent ! repent !
Turn—and a Saviour's love believe !
Turn from the world—and for Him live.

“Turn—'tis the happiest life below,
To spend, and to be spent,
In His dear service ; it can make
The lowliest heart content :
Turn—there's no peace like that He gives ;
No life like that the Christian lives.

“Oh ! catch the moments as they fly,
And let them bear for thee
Some record of thy love for Him
Into Eternity !
Each passing hour brings more near
The solemn day when He'll appear.

“Ye purchased ones, who know His love,
Oh ! let your holy light,
In loving labours for His sake,
Shine brighter and more bright !
For He will surely quickly come,
And take you to His glorious home.”



CHAPTER XV.

THE WISE HOUSEHOLDER.

MATT. xiii. 51, 52.

“Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. Then said He unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE WISE HOUSEHOLDER.

OUR blessed Lord having made an end of speaking these seven parables, now turns to His disciples and asks, "Have ye understood all these things?" The question was asked with a view to their becoming teachers of others. For it is only as taught by Him that we are able to teach others. They say unto Him, "Yea, Lord."

All truth received is responsibility. Better never to have heard it than to hold it either in unrighteousness, or even like the slothful servant's pound, to be hid in a napkin. "Therefore," the Saviour adds, "every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." Such an one "turneth" or "dealeth out"—out of his treasure or store of divine truth—things new and old. By the coming of the Lord and the gift of the Holy Ghost, the truths of the Old Testament received a new light, and those of the New Testament received confirmation from the Old. Old truths had new aspects. New truths had old fore-shadowings. A new world of truth was, as it

were, thrown open to the soul. If we look at the New Testament we shall find this remarkable fact, that there is not one doctrine in it that is not in the Old. God revealed all truth in the Old Testament, but men did not see it there. Just like the "householder," these things were in his house all the time, but the guest did not see them till the master of the house brought them forth. Though they were new to the *guest*, they were not new to the *Master*. Thus the Beloved speaks in the Canticles: "the mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are *all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old*, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved!" (Cant. vii. 31).

These fruits laid up for us by the Lord Jesus at our very gates we have to draw upon continually and give out to others. The Word is His treasure-house. It is from this we must live ourselves. It is this that is the Holy Spirit's food for others. The manner in which this Word is to be used may be illustrated by a pedlar and his basket. He comes to your door with a great store of all manner of things. You say, "I want a certain thing." He turns his stock over and over, and at last presents you with that which you exactly need. Just so are we to use all God's truth. That, and only that, is the believer's store-basket. As we go through this needy world full of sins and sorrows, sores and bruises, let us take out from that store, as *wise* householders, just that which each one needs.

But let us never forget, in these days of departure from the truth as it is in Jesus, that the store is the Word of God. Reader, take your stand by it and only it. In reply to all cavils, and all rationalistic scoffers, let this be the language of your heart and also of your lips—

“I take my stand with Jesus, and if what He says about man’s present and future state be not true, I have not the slightest reason for thinking anything else is. All other thoughts about them are but as a fevered dream, which I may at once dismiss, for I have no testimony to rely on: and none of those who think and write about them, apart from Scripture, can furnish proof that they think rightly and truly: it is but imagination, which may be utterly vain. But in accepting Christ’s testimony, I have that of the Lord of earth and heaven, the Governor and Judge of the present and the future—not merely the God of this material world, but of the spiritual world also—‘the God of the spirits of all flesh,’ who gave man his spirit and recalls it at His will. And He who made me tells me He has redeemed me. He who invites me to trust His blood is the same who shed it, and knows it is fragrant and accepted before God on my behalf. He who speaks to me of death on account of sin is the same who ‘died for our sins according to the Scriptures.’ He who cheers me with resurrection hopes is the same who burst the grave, and ‘rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.’ And He who beckons me to heaven *is there*: He has ascended and entered in as my Forerunner with His own blood. I receive these truths on the testimony of God my Saviour, ‘Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.’”

“Living Fountain; ever flowing,
Source of every joy to me;
Full and free Thy grace bestowing,
Fill my soul with love to Thee!

Nothing else is satisfying,
 Nothing less can give me peace ;
 All of earth is passing—dying,
 All its pleasures soon shall cease.

“Living Fountain ! holy ! glorious !
 Cleanse my heart from every sin,
 By Thy strength make me victorious
 O'er each selfish thought within.
 Mighty Spirit in me dwelling,
 More and more, my Lord reveal ;
 Till my soul with rapture swelling,
 Speaks the joy it can't conceal.

“Living Fountain ! pure and changeless,
 Healing power to me apply ;
 I am weak ! In mercy boundless,
 Oh ! refresh me—grace supply !
 Living Saviour, shine upon me,
 Let me feel Thy presence near :
 Friends may fail, and foes may scorn me,
 If Thy loving voice I hear.

“Living Fountain ! source of blessing,
 All my fresh springs are in Thee !
 While Thy love I am possessing,
 Earthly joys are dross to me !
 Nothing, Lord, can cheer without Thee,
 For my bliss is in Thy smile :
 All is dark, if I should doubt Thee ;
 With Thee, all is bright the while.

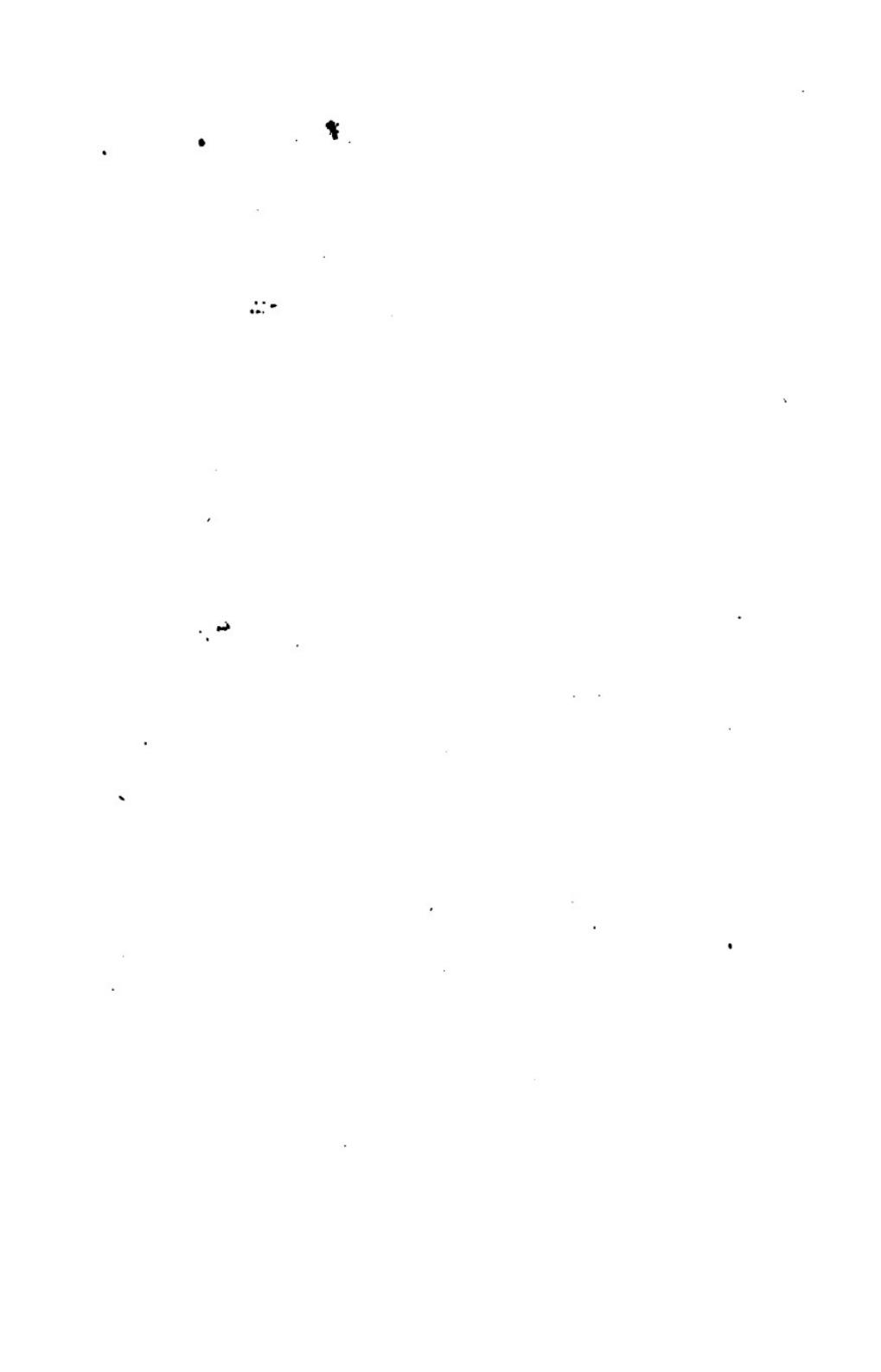
“Living Fountain ! oh ! how dreary
 Were my way, but for Thy love ;
 Light of Life ! when sad and weary,
 Shine Thou on me from above !
 Shew to me that Home of glory,
 Where Thy sainted ones are bless'd.
 Teach me now to sing the story
 Of the love that gives us rest.

“ Having passed the land of weeping,
Prayer shall change to songs of praise,
Hallowed chords my fingers sweeping,
Oh ! what songs to Thee I 'll raise !
Living Fountain ! keep me near Thee,
Till life's trials are all o'er ;
I 'm not lonely when I hear Thee
Say, ‘ I 'm with thee, weep no more.’

“ Living Fountain ! all may leave me,
If Thou dost Thyself reveal :
Nought of earth can harm or grieve me,
When Thy Spirit's power I feel.
Death or judgment can't dismay me ;
Thou my debt of guilt hast paid ;
With Thyself Thou wilt array me,
Thou my Righteousness art made.”

C. H. L.

THE END.



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